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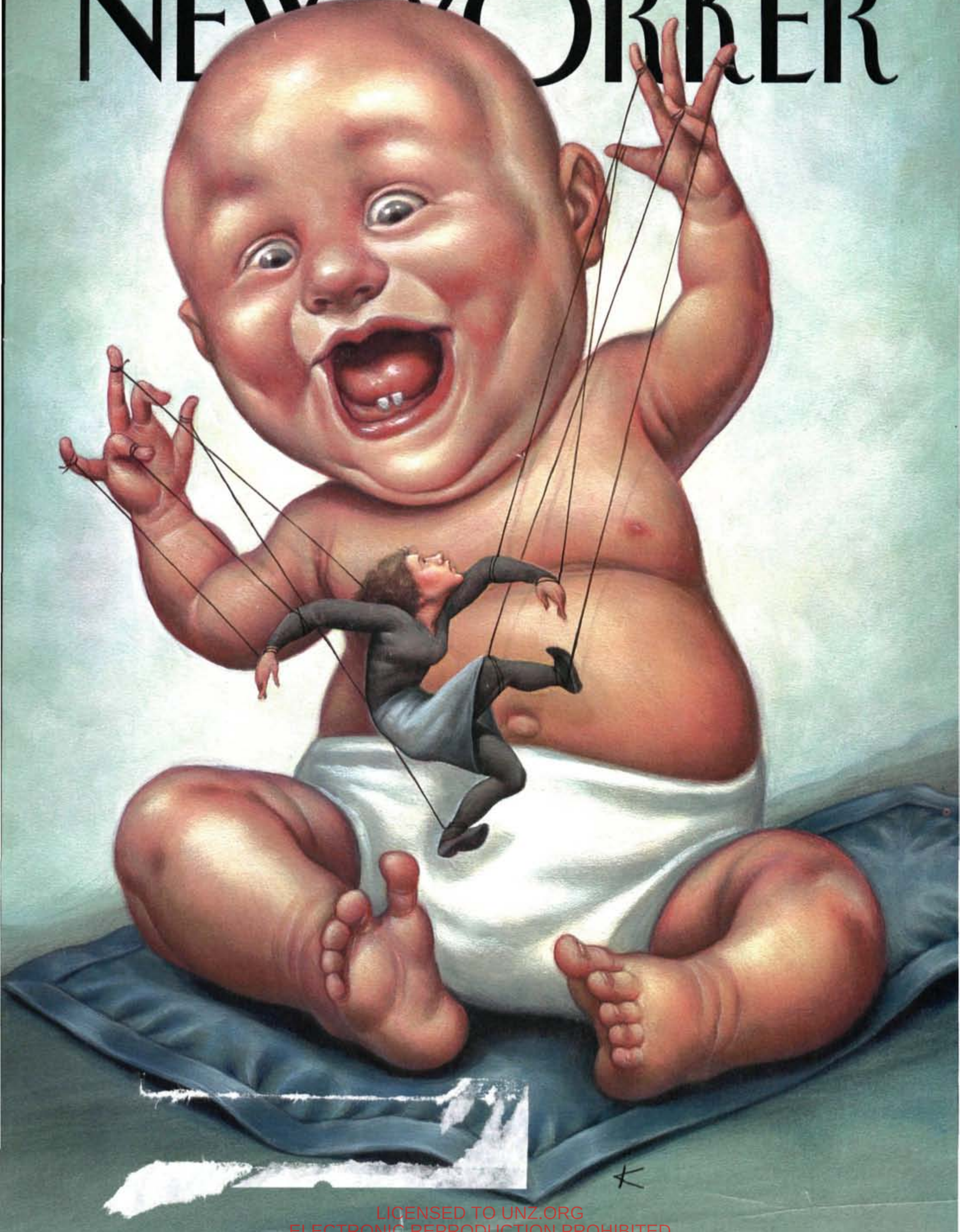
THE NEW YORKER

MAY 14, 2001



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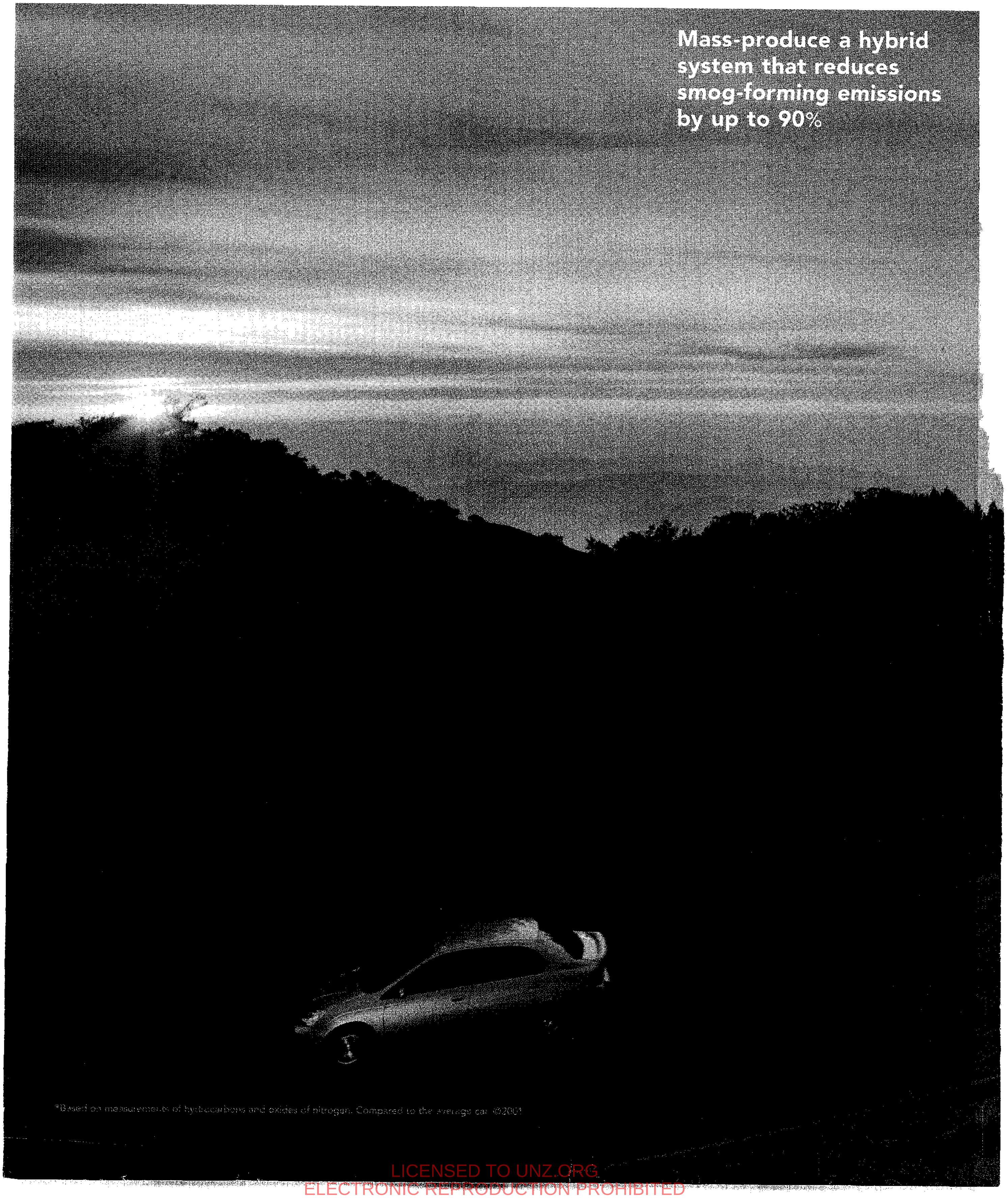
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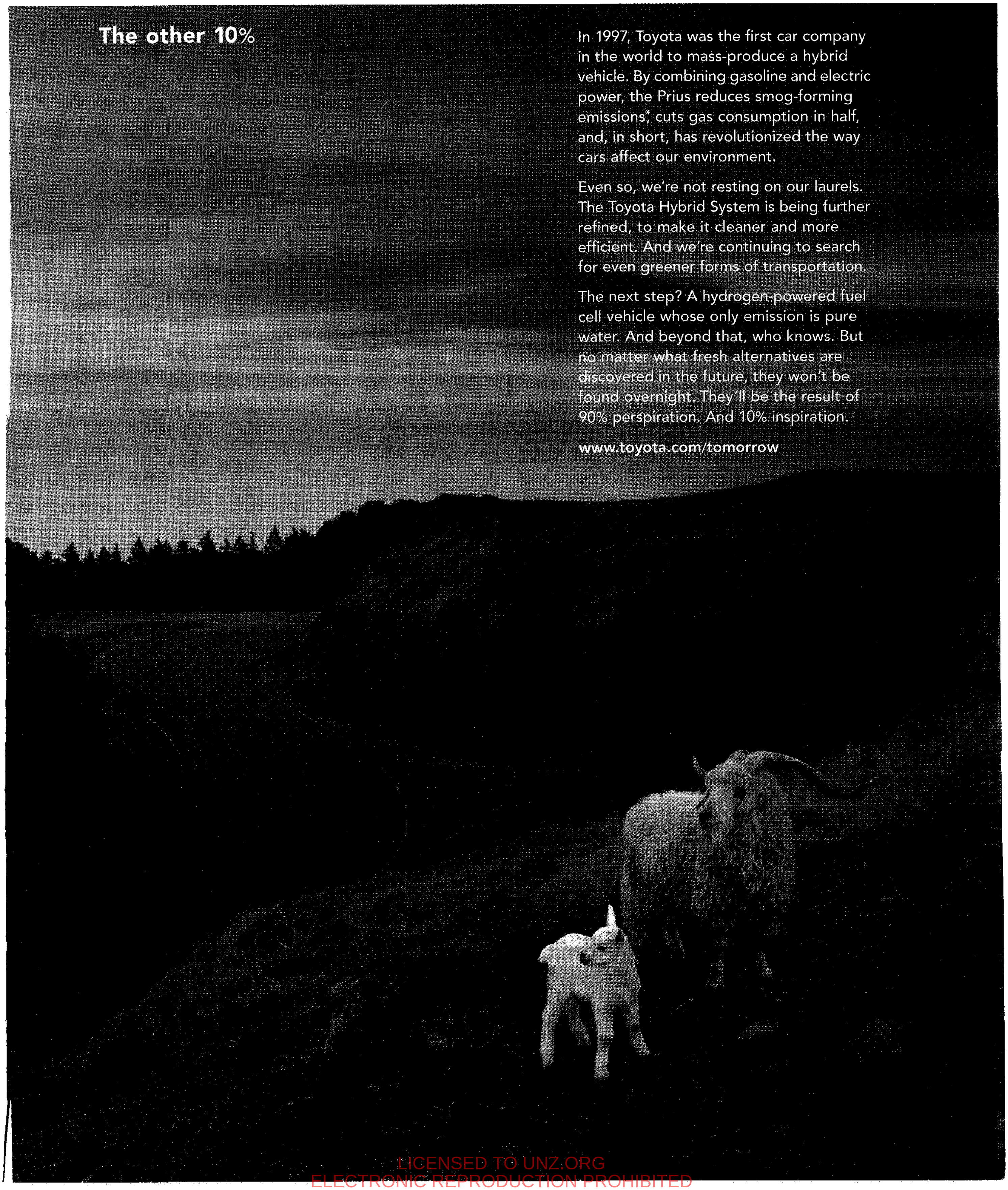

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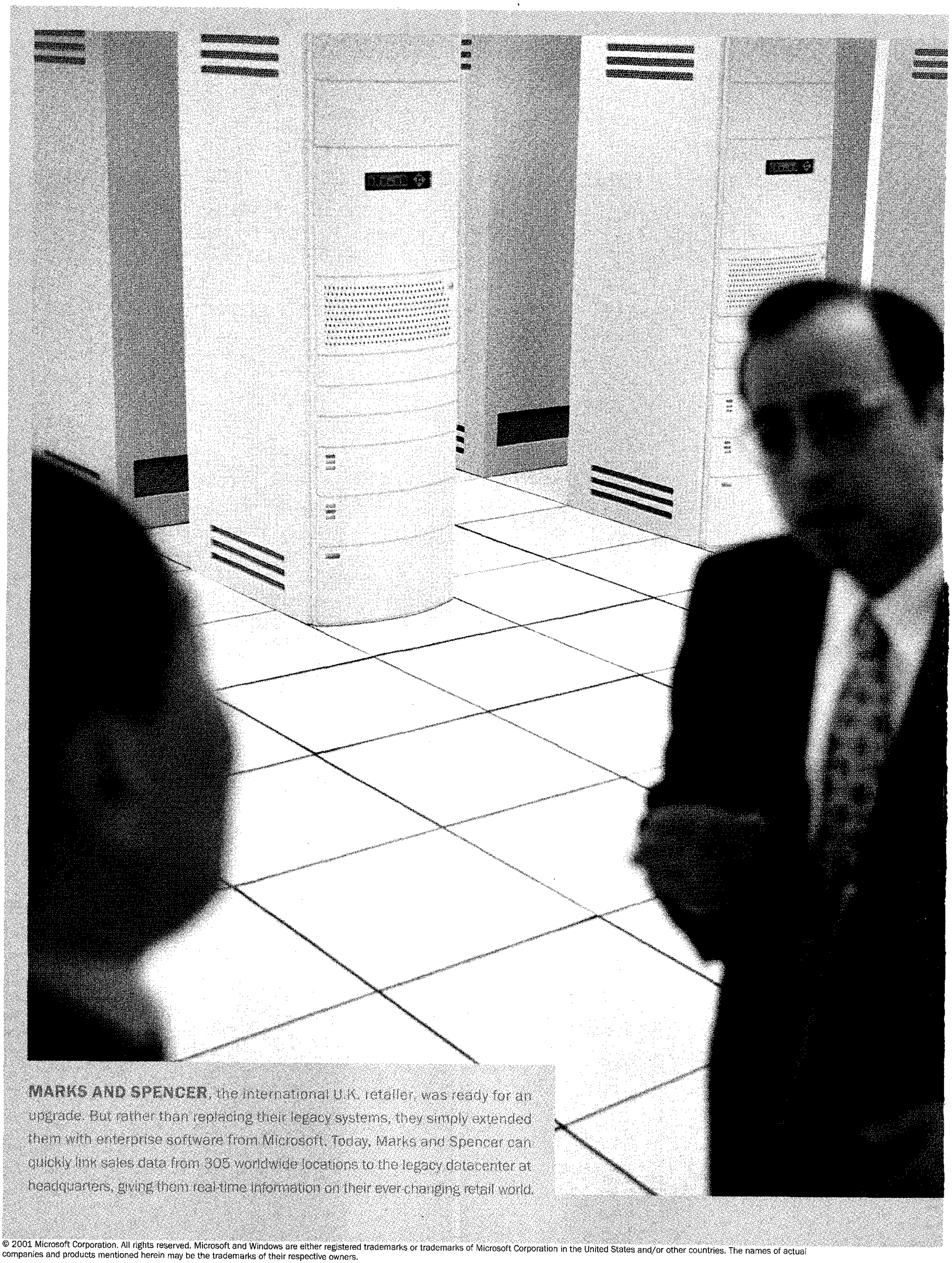

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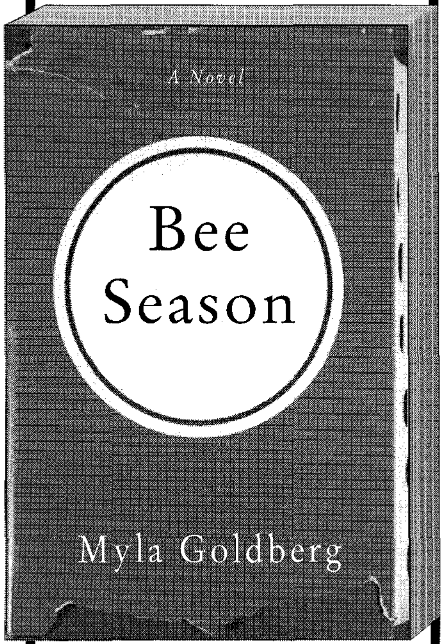

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MAY 14, 2001

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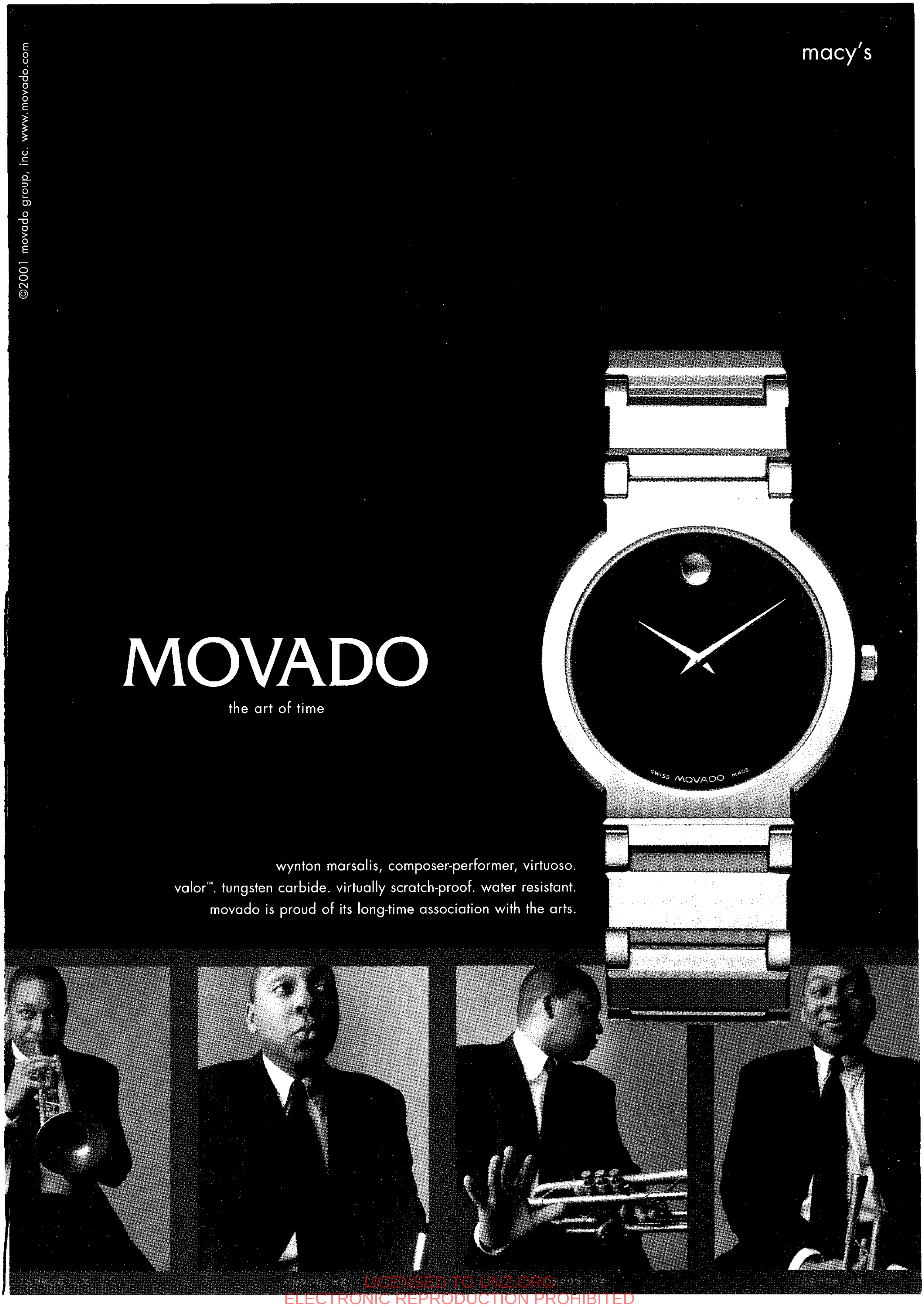
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CONTRIBUTORS

Tad Friend ("The Next Big Bet," p. 80) is a staff writer. His first book, "Lost in Mongolia: Travels in Hollywood and Other Foreign Lands," has just been published.

Jonathan Rosen ("The Ghost Bird," p. 61) is the author of "The Talmud and the Internet: A Journey between Worlds."

Mark Singer ("Never Surrender," p. 52) has been a staff writer since 1974. His books include "Mr. Personality" and "Citizen K."

Jim Windolf (Shouts & Murmurs, p. 58) is a writer and editor.

Elizabeth Royte (The Talk of the Town, p. 50) writes about science and the environment. Her book "The Tapir's Morning Bath" will be out in September.

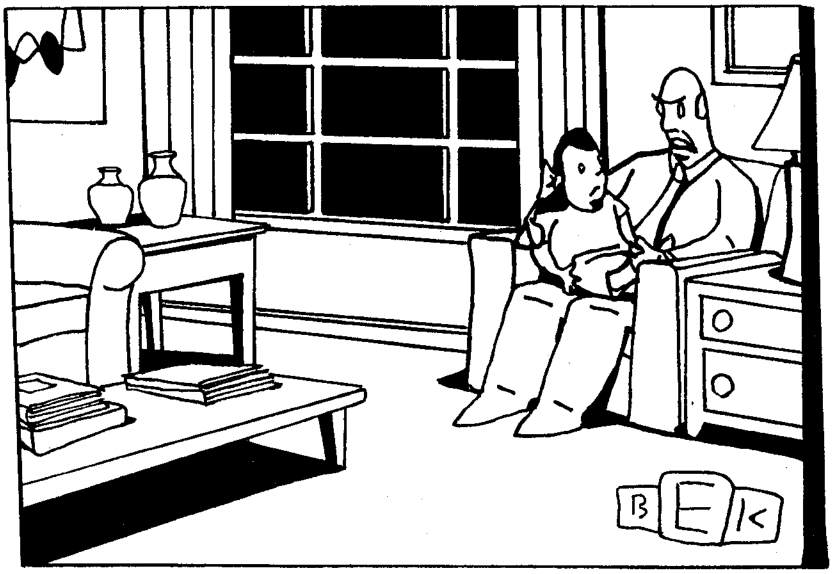
Elsa Walsh ("Louis Freeh's Last Case," p. 68) is the author of "Divided Lives: The Public and Private Struggles of Three American Women."

Anne Enright (Fiction, p. 92) is an Irish writer whose novel "What Are You Like?" was published last fall.

James Fenton (Poem, p. 88) has just published "The Strength of Poetry," a collection of lectures he delivered as Professor of Poetry at Oxford from 1994 to 1999. This poem comes from the libretto of a new opera, "The Love Bomb."

David Denby (The Current Cinema, p. 112) is a film critic for the magazine.

Judith Thurman (In Fashion, p. 96) is the author of biographies of Isak Dinesen and Colette. ♦



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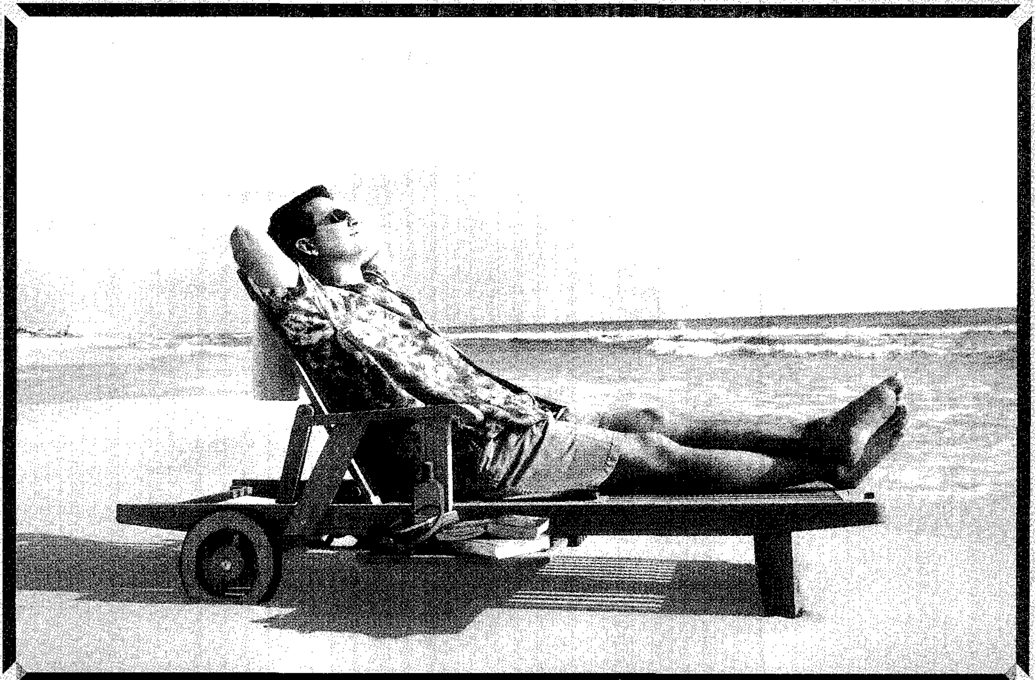

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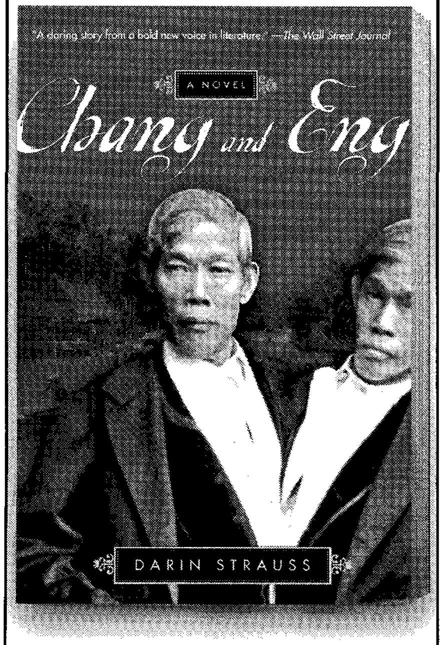
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ONE STRONG WOMAN

Katherine Boo's report on the sacrifices, temptations, and success of Elizabeth Jones and her family gives a clear picture of the hazards the poor face ("After Welfare," April 9th). Jones, who left welfare and holds down two jobs—one as a Washington, D.C., police officer—is doing all that anyone could expect to rise out of poverty by hard work, while protecting her three children as best she can from the ghetto dangers outside their door. Yet sometimes it's not enough. One has hopes for Jones—she's got grit, and is hanging on to a vision of a better life. But her tale of individual perseverance begs some larger questions: How did this country create such a mess, and how can we make things better? That's America's problem, not hers.

David Balderton
New York City

Is there any doubt that, if the ten thousand dollars or so that the District of Columbia spends per pupil each year were handed over to Jones, in the form of vouchers, she could find a better option for her children than what her local school district, with its limited choice of charter schools, offers them? Our school system is a failure, not because we're not spending enough (although we should spend more) but because we aren't honest enough to accept that it has failed, and move on. Vouchers mean change, with all the risk that implies, but almost anything would be better than nothing, which is what Jones's kids get now.

Geoffrey Barker
Bainbridge Island, Wash.

Boo's story illustrates how the simplistic concept of meritocracy, which drove welfare reform forward, doesn't apply to everyone. The notion that you can pull yourself up by your bootstraps ignores the myriad educational, racial, familial, and economic problems that people face in neighborhoods like the Shrimp Boat. They simply lack the social scaffolding that many of us take for granted. Meanwhile, politicians vote in favor of cutting welfare benefits but against subsidized day care, universal health insurance, and other programs that make families stronger. Until we realize that the urban poor aren't problem people but people with problems, the cycle of poverty, despair, and dependence will continue.

David Owen
Brooklyn, N.Y.

I wondered, reading Boo's article, how long the Jones family would remain in D.C. There are good schools and jobs in northern Virginia and Maryland, and Jones, who has already succeeded in lifting herself out of the mire of welfare, can now take the next step and flee the horror of her neighborhood. But, if moving is the answer for one strong woman, the District itself will continue to deteriorate until someone realizes that, because the important things were left unattended, the people it desperately needs in order to save itself—strivers like Jones—have all gone away.

Andrea L. Engel
Falls Church, Va.

Boo's article captures the dilemma in which many "beneficiaries" of welfare reform find themselves. In order to work full time, mothers are forced to leave young children inadequately cared for during the day and teens unsupervised after school. We should urge members of Congress, who will soon turn to the reauthorization of the welfare bill, not to be blinded by ideology but to consider Boo's article a reality check, and recognize the obstacles faced by all families struggling to work their way into a better life.

Kathy Rodgers
President, NOW Legal Defense and
Education Fund
New York City

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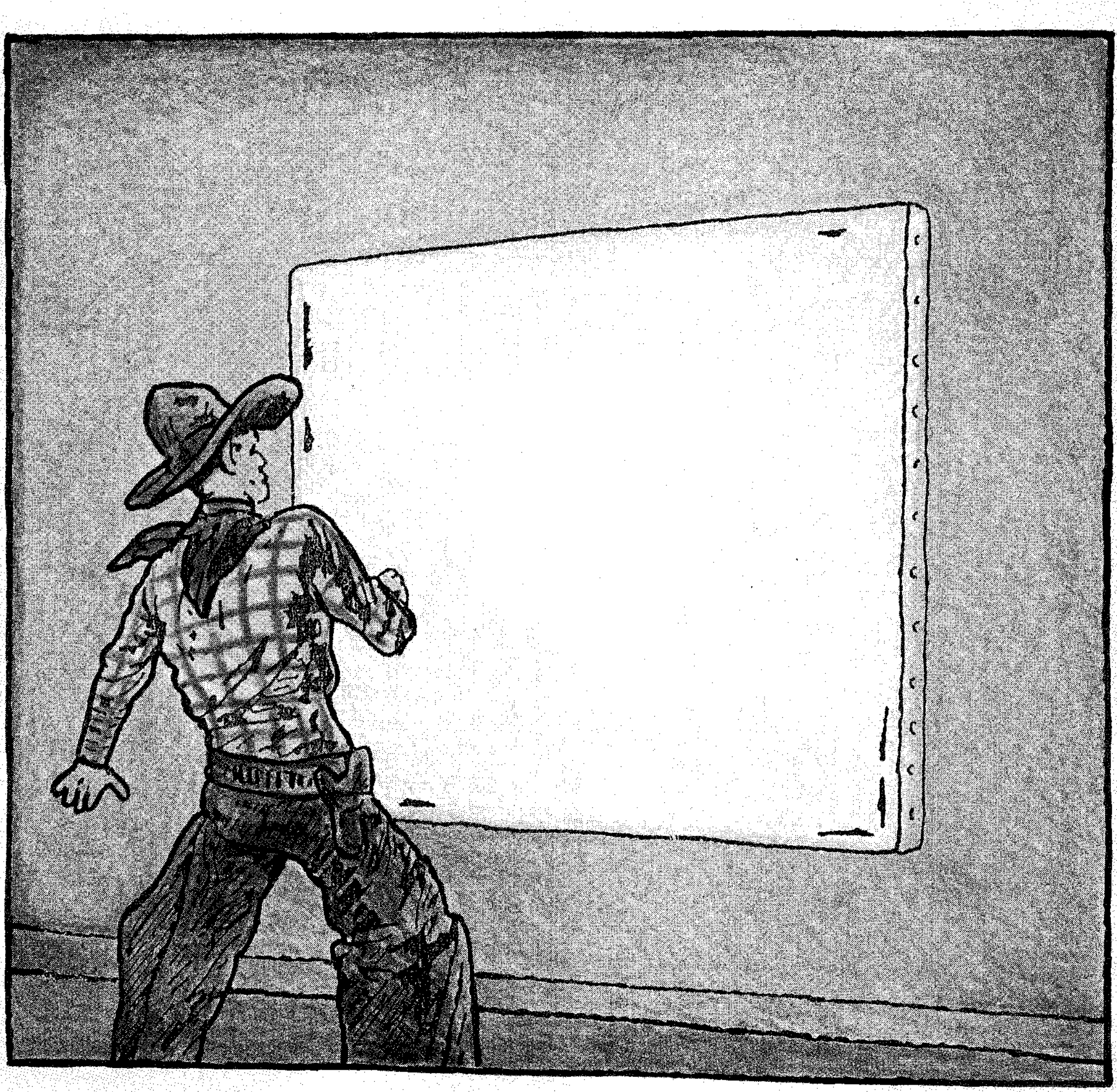

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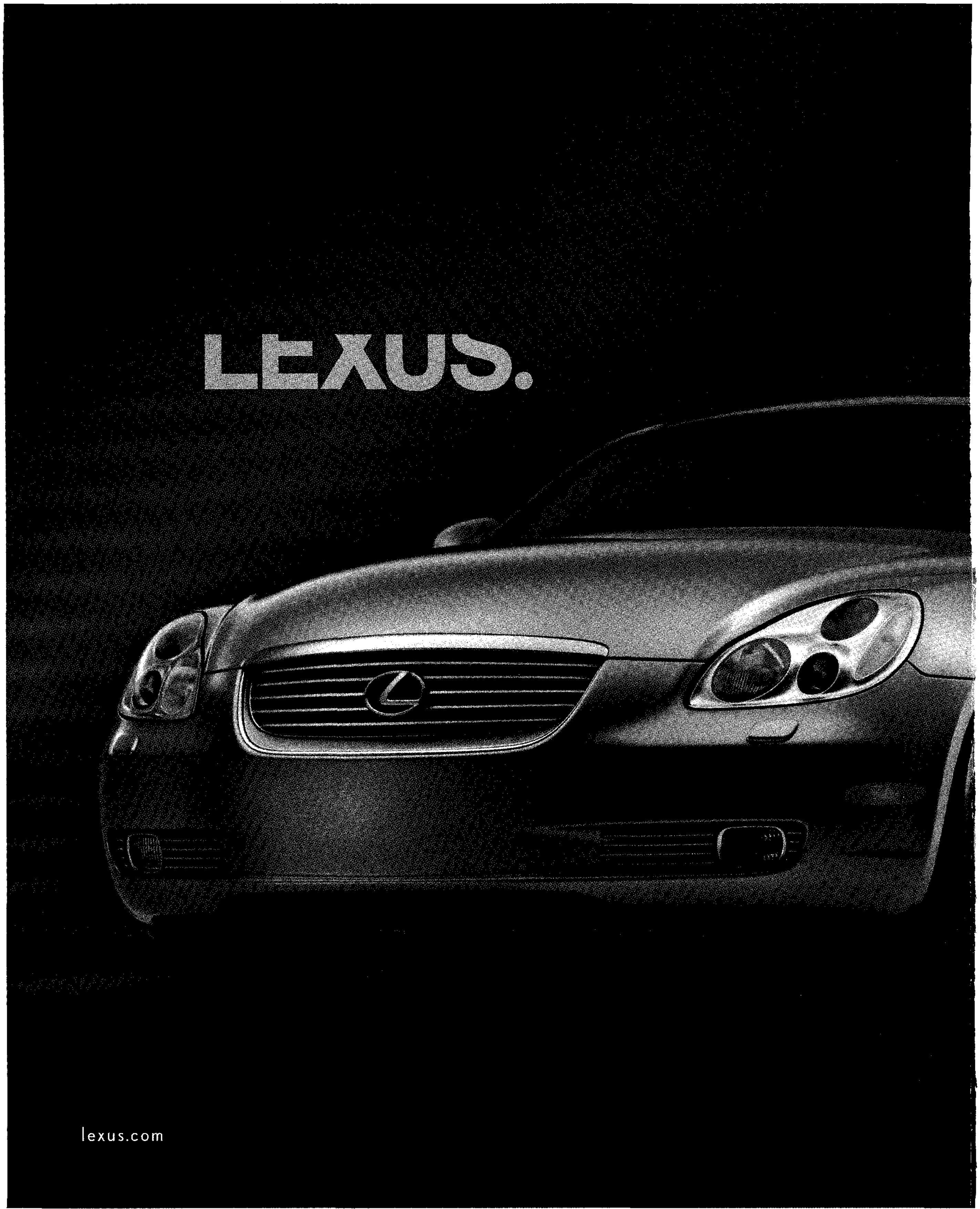
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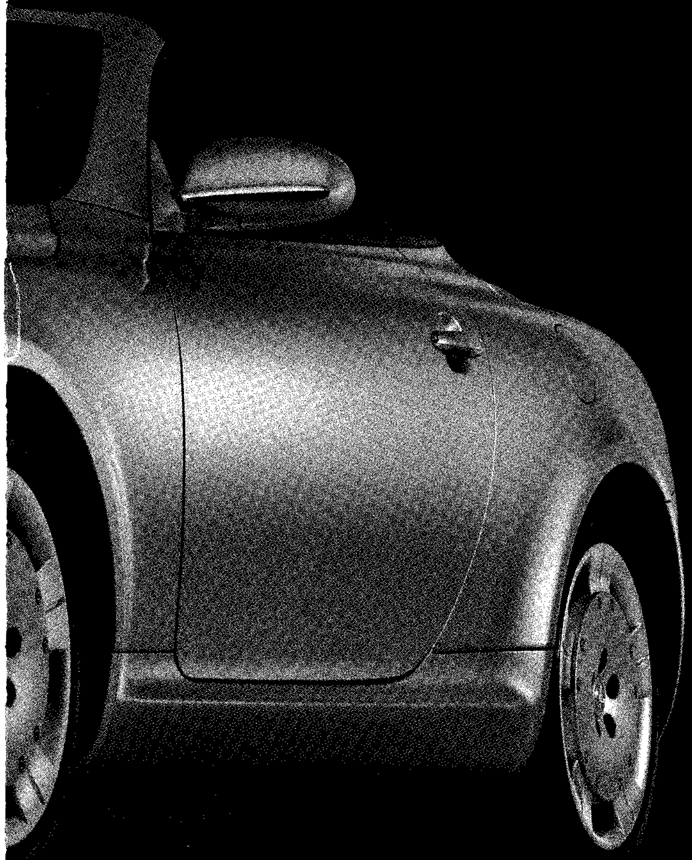

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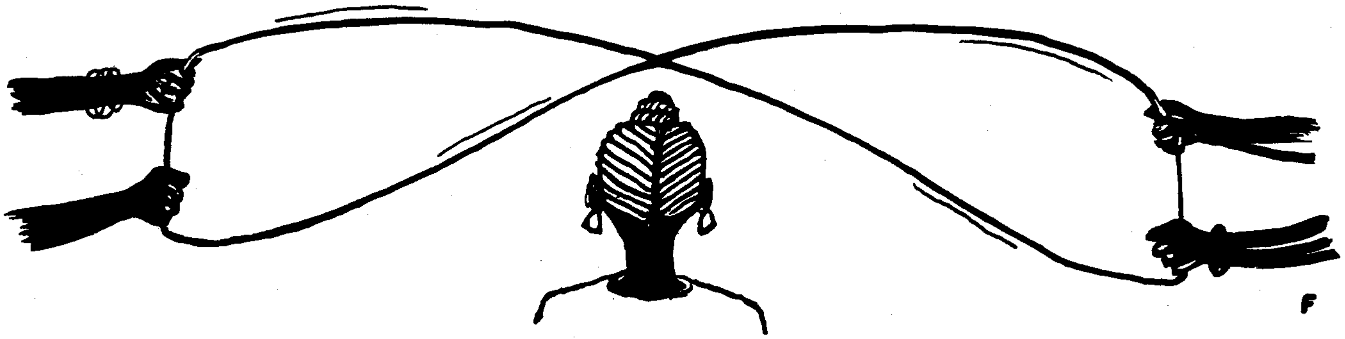

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS & PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

BLUR
A new comedy by Melanie Marnich, in which a teen-ager discovers she's going blind. In previews. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

CHAUCER IN ROME
The latest play by John Guare, set in Italy during the final year of the last millennium. Nicholas Martin is the director. Previews begin May 10. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, 150 W. 65th St. 239-6200.)

THE CREDEAUX CANVAS
Michael Mayer directs a play by Keith Bunin, about three ambitious East Villagers with a scheme. Previews begin May 11. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 279-4200.)

THE DOG PROBLEM
David Rabe's new play, about a man, his dog, and the Mafia. In previews. (Atlantic, 336 W. 20th St. 239-6200.)

ENSEMBLE STUDIO THEATRE
This year's six-week marathon of one-acts begins May 9 at 7:30 with plays by Billy Aronson, Tom Coash, David Ives, and Cherie Vogelstein. The first series runs through May 20. The marathon continues through June 17. (549 W. 52nd St. 247-4982.)

GLIMMER, GLIMMER & SHINE
From Warren Leight ("Side Man"), a new drama about jazz musicians—twin brothers who were big-band trumpeters together in the fifties. In previews. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

LIPSTICK TRACES
Greil Marcus's paean to punk rock, adapted for the stage by the Austin troupe Rude Mechanicals and presented by the Foundry Theatre. Preview on May 9. Opens May 10 at 7:30. (Ohio Theatre, 66 Wooster St. 800-965-4827.)

SEE BOB RUN
Daniel MacIvor's drama about a talkative hitchhiker (Susan O'Connor) is back for a limited run. In previews May 10-11. Opens May 12 at 8. (Rattlestick Theatre, 224 Waverly Pl. 627-2556.)

OPENED RECENTLY

THE ADVENTURES OF TOM SAWYER
The musical. With a score by Don Schlitz and a book by Ken Ludwig. Scott Ellis is the director. (Minskoff, 200 W. 45th St. 307-4100.)

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			9	10	11	12
13	14	15				

AJAX
The Bat Theatre Company presents Alice Tuan's play about a sexual foursome. (Flea Theatre, 41 White St., between Broadway and Church St. 226-2407.)

BAT BOY: THE MUSICAL
A kind of "My Fair Bat Boy," in which a half-bat, half-man—memorably played by Deven May—emerges from his childhood cave into adult bourgeois life. But the musical world he enters is one of darkness, not light, of ironies, not idealism, where plot is a history of abdications and song extolls the emptiness of all the standard credos—Christianity, family, community, love, redemption—and of the musical itself. It's a jejune vision, but a smart, playful, and funny one nonetheless. (Reviewed in our issue of 4/9/01.) (Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 307-4100.)

BELLS ARE RINGING
Faith Prince and Marc Kudisch lead the cast in a revival of the 1956 Betty Comden–Adolph Green–Jule Styne musical. Tina Landau is the director. (Plymouth, 236 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

THE BOOK OF LIZ
In the latest comedy by the brother-and-sister team of Amy and David Sedaris, Ms. Sedaris portrays the sweating, mousy Elizabeth, a demure Puritan believer from the religious Squeamish Community who goes on a picaresque adventure after being refused the honor of organizing the Chastity Parade. As comic drama, the play is sort of an amateur fizzle, but it does offer the Sedarises the opportunity to tell some very good jokes in silly costumes and to bask in the smug downtown certainty of a soiled world. (4/9/01) (Greenwich House, 27 Barrow St. 239-6200.)

CAVEMAN
The latest play from the pen of Richard Maxwell runs in repertory with his earlier play "Boxing 2000." (SoHo Rep, 46 Walker St. 479-7979. Closes May 19.)

A CLASS ACT
Ed Kleban's life following his success as the lyricist of "A Chorus Line" is the basis of this musical. With songs by Mr. Kleban and a book by Linda Kline and Lonny Price. Mr. Price is the director. (Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 239-6200.)

CODE OF THE WEST
Mark R. Giesser's play about the San Franciscan Joshua A. Norton, who proclaimed himself emperor of the United States and protector of Mexico in the eighteen-fifties. (McGinn/Cazale, Broadway at 76th St. 279-4200.)

CRIMES OF THE HEART
The Irish director Garry Hynes ("The Beauty Queen of Leenane") proves herself to be as comfortable in Dixie as she is on the Emerald Isle with this sparkling revival of Beth Henley's 1979 comedy, about three eccentric sisters having a very bad day down in Hazlehurst, Mississippi. Things at first are a bit broad and ridiculous (this is the Deep South), but Henley's characters have real warmth, and the terrific cast (Julia Murney, Enid Graham, Talmadge Lowe, Amy Ryan, Mary Catherine Garrison, and Jason Butler Harner) embraces the roles with vivid affection and spot-on comic timing. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 246-4422. Closes May 13.)

THE DEAD EYE BOY
Lili Taylor leads the cast in a drama by Angus MacLachlan, about a woman trying to escape a past filled with drug abuse and violence. (MCC Theatre, 120 W. 28th St. 727-7765. Closes May 13.)

DESIGN FOR LIVING
Noël Coward's (then scandalous) 1933 tale of an insouciant ménage à trois (Jennifer Ehle, Dominic West, and Alan Cumming) is a lecture masquerading as theatre; it's too schematic and too self-important for the cruelty to play out in surprising ways. Still, Joe Mantello's production is superbly cast and well focussed. (3/26/01) (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 719-1300. Closes May 13.)

ELI'S COMIN'
A musical inspired by the songs of Laura Nyro, co-created by Diane Paulus and Bruce Buschel. (Vineyard Theatre, 108 E. 15th St. 353-0303.)

FOLLIES
This revival of Stephen Sondheim and James Goldman's landmark 1971 musical, which takes place at a reunion of Ziegfeld-like performers, is less lavish than the original production, but no matter: the show's real grandeur lies in its imaginative structure and the unfolding of its lyrically rich, resonant songs. In the hands of Matthew Warchus, who directed, the relentless, unblinking intelligence is intact. The theme of loss and regret is played out in the unhappy marriages of two middle-aged couples, convincingly played by Blythe Danner, Gregory Harrison, Judith Ivey, and Treat Williams, against a backdrop of show-business dreams and promises enacted by performers from a bygone era. (Of these, Marge Champion and Joan Roberts are especially delightful.) You may want your pleasures to be a little less ambiguous than those offered here; it's possible to leave the theatre feeling a little mixed up inside, as though you've just received the most unforgettable parting kiss of your life. (4/23 & 30/01) (Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

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FORTY-SECOND STREET
Michael Cumpsty, Christine Ebersole, Mary Testa, and Jonathan Freeman star in a revival of the 1980 musical comedy. (Ford Center, 213 W. 42nd St. 307-4100.)

THE GATHERING
Hal Linden portrays a Holocaust survivor in Arje Shaw's drama about three generations of a Jewish family. Rebecca Taylor is the director. (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

GEORGE GERSHWIN ALONE
A one-man portrait with music, written and performed by Hershey Felder and directed by Joel Zwick. (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 349-6200.)

THE GOOD THIEF
As the sole character onstage in Conor McPherson's hour-long monologue for an Irishman, Brian d'Arcy James narrates and relives a botched bit of thuggery and its aftermath, in which he accidentally kills a man and flees with the newly widowed, strangely placid Mrs. Mitchell and her small daughter, Neve. It cannot end well for these three, but amid the violence and mayhem—all offstage, summoned by the actor, whose eyes glitter dangerously—there are moments of redemption. (45 Bleecker Theatre, at 45 Bleecker St. 307-4100.)

THE INVENTION OF LOVE
Tom Stoppard's witty, challenging account of the classicist and poet A. E. Housman and the love that not only dared not speak its name but didn't even have one until 1895 (when the word "homosexual" was coined). Jack O'Brien's well-directed, lucid production features a sumptuous set by Bob Crowley and some fine acting, especially by Richard Easton as the elder/dead Housman—he parses every sentence and joke so that the audience is never at sea—and Robert Sean Leonard as the young classicist in love. David Harbour also turns in a vivid portrait as the sporty object of Housman's platonic affection. (Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

THE IT GIRL
The York Theatre Company presents a musical adaptation of "It," the 1927 movie that made Clara Bow a star. (Theatre at St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 239-6200. Closes May 27.)

JANE EYRE
John Caird and Paul Gordon's musical is respectful of and faithful to Brontë's original, but it needs to be brilliant and piercing, and it isn't. (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 307-4100.)

JUDGMENT AT NUREMBERG
Maximilian Schell and George Grizzard lead the cast in the Abby Mann drama. John Tillinger is the director. (Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 239-6280.)

KING HEDLEY II
August Wilson's new play revisits the locale (Pittsburgh's Hill District) and some of the characters from his 1995 drama, "Seven Guitars." Brian Stokes Mitchell leads the cast. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200.)

LACKAWANNA BLUES
The prodigiously talented Ruben Santiago-Hudson (who won a basketful of awards several years ago for his performance in August Wilson's "Seven Guitars") tells the story of Nanny, the bighearted woman who helped raise him in an upstate boarding house, and the other characters who lived there. By turns poignant, passionate, and nostalgic, Santiago-Hudson blows haunting, evocative riffs on his harmonica, accompanied by the blues guitar of Bill Sims. The monologue is all about goodness, and Santiago-Hudson honors it with an excellence all his own. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 260-2400. Closes May 20.)

LOVE, JANIS
A paean to Janis Joplin, at the spiffy new theatre that was formerly the Village Gate, built around Joplin's songs, writings, and interviews. Though it contains no new insight, it's a useful corrective to the drunken, drug-addicted legend, and the production is a fine one. Randal Myler directed with a sure eye for the telling detail, and the seven-member band really cooks. Two singers alternate as "singing Janis"; on a recent night Cathy Richardson was in splendid voice and demeanor. The backbone of the evening, however, is Catherine Curtin's "speaking Janis." It's an intelligent, vulnerable, self-aware performance that transcends the Janis myth and showcases the talent of a powerful actress. (Village Theatre, 158 Bleecker St. 307-4100.)

MADAME MELVILLE
Macaulay Culkin is a fifteen-year-old American student and Joely Richardson his French teacher, in a drama by Richard Nelson, set in nineteen-sixties Paris. (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 580-1313.)

MNEMONIC
For sheer theatrical aplomb—the exhilarating marriage of the surreal body to the surreal intellect—nothing can top the latest show by the actor and director Simon McBurney and his Theatre de Complicite. With startling images, sounds, and shifts of focus, three stories unravel with the lucidity, the detachment, and the surprise of a Magritte, to remind us that we ourselves are a work of fiction, and that remembering is an act of imagination. (4/9/01) (John Jay College, 899 Tenth Ave., at 58th St. 239-6200.)

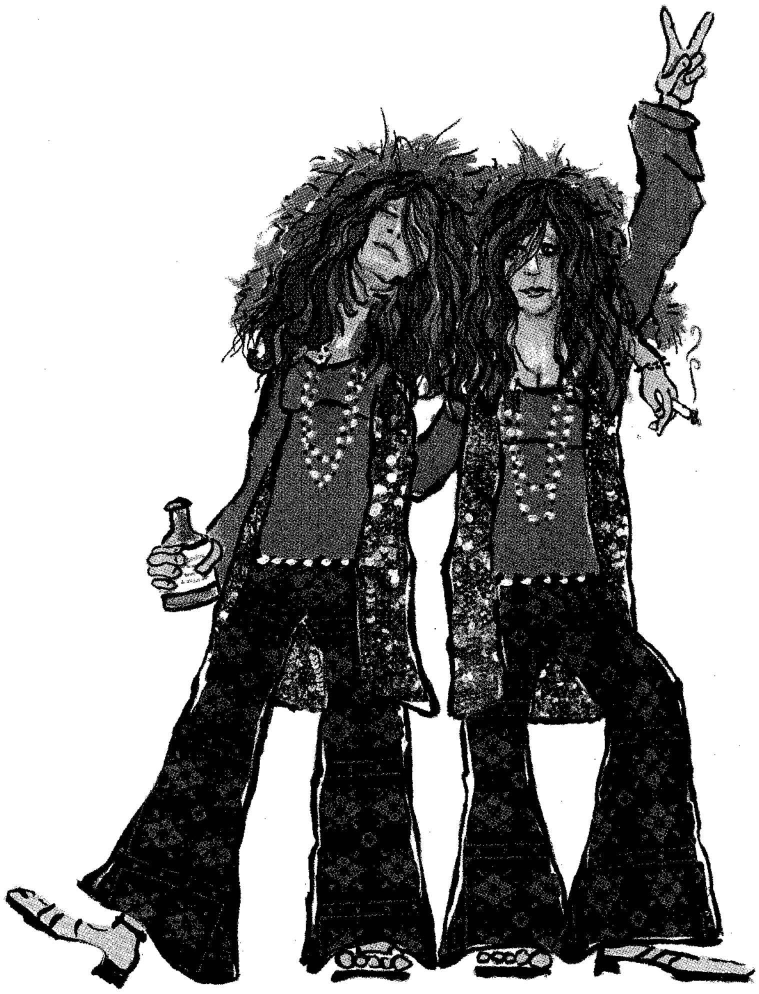
ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST
Dale Wasserman's severely dated adaptation of Ken Kesey's 1962 novel—a broad allegory, set in a mental hospital, about the perils of nonconformity—is a quaint relic, but as staged by Chicago's excellent Steppenwolf Theatre it's a well-acted one. Gary Sinise leads the cast, as the incorrigible mental patient Randle P. McMurphy. Terry Kinney is the director. (Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

PEARL THEATRE COMPANY
Jean-François Regnard's 1708 comedy, "A Will of His Own," runs in repertory with Racine's "Andromache." (80 St. Marks Pl. 598-9802.)

THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY
A stage adaptation by Joe O'Byrne of Oscar Wilde's novel. (Irish Repertory Theatre, 132 W. 22nd St. 727-2737. Closes May 20.)

THE PLAY ABOUT THE BABY
In Edward Albee's new play, an older couple provide a harsh taste of what life has in store for a young couple with a new baby: the ravages of adulthood, the tidal wave of troubles and injuries that come with time. Brian Murray and Marian Seldes, two veterans who are rarely less than riveting, make the most of Albee's sharp, enigmatic writing; their highly stylized, virtuosic performances here are stunning. David Esbjornson directed. (2/19 & 26/01) (Century Center, 111 E. 15th St. 239-6200.)

THE PRODUCERS
Matthew Broderick and Nathan Lane star in Mel Brooks's musical version of his 1968 movie, under the direction of Susan Stroman. (5/7/01) (St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)



Randal Myler's "Love, Janis," at the Village Theatre.

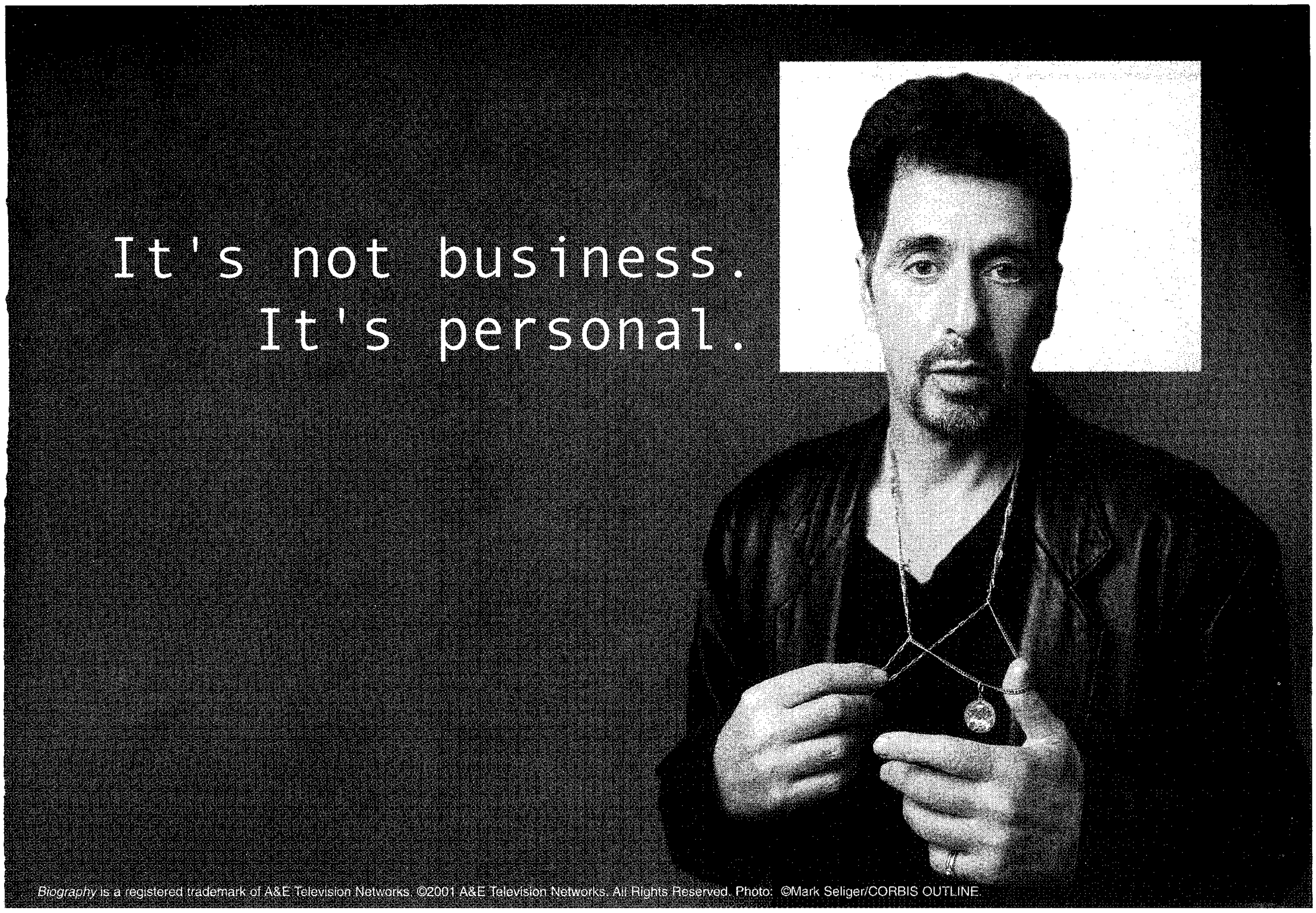
ROBERT MELEE

SEUSSICAL
For all the whimsy of Theodor Geisel's doggerel, what's missing in this relentlessly cute musical by the team of Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty is mayhem and magic. It's a show with curiously little charm. (12/25/00 & 1/1/01) (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 307-4100.)

SINCERITY FOREVER
A Bat Theatre Company revival of Mac Wellman's 1991 play. (Flea Theatre, 41 White St., between Broadway and Church St. 226-2407. Closes May 26.)

A SKULL IN CONNEMARA
The middle play in Martin McDonagh's Leenane trilogy. Like the others, it is permeated by violence, decay, death, and humor—humor that, in this case, is predominantly of the patronizing, stage-Irish variety and saturated in alcohol. Gordon Edelstein directed. (3/5/01) (Gramercy, 127 E. 23rd St. 777-4900. Closes May 27.)

STONES IN HIS POCKETS
Marie Jones's play, which began life in Belfast a couple of years ago, is set in an Irish village where a big-budget Hollywood movie is being made. Conleth Hill and Seán Campion play two extras in the movie and all thirteen other characters as well,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Al Pacino 5/14
Cheryl Tiegs 5/15
Peter Frampton 5/16
Dominick Dunne 5/17
Teri Garr 5/18
Mitzi Gaynor 5/19
James Caan 5/21
Dizzy Gillespie 5/22
Oscar Wilde 5/23
John McEnroe 5/24
Tony Curtis 5/25
Janet Gaynor 5/26
Sean Puffy Combs 5/28
Tim McGraw 5/29
Richard Branson 5/30
Rosemary Clooney 5/31

Begins May 1 at 8pm/7c
Schedule subject to change. Check your local listings.

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Dancers from the Brooklyn-based Creative Outlet Dance Theatre.

JOHN DOLAN

including the movie's female star, its director, and various locals. Though the play has its clever ways when it comes to sending up both Hollywood and Irish mores, the stories told here aren't anything you haven't seen before. Still, Hill and Campion, under the direction of Ian McElhinney, go at their parts with such relish that the evening has an almost vaudevillian theatricality about it. (4/16/01) (Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

TROILUS AND CRESSIDA
This is not a good play. Nonetheless, it contains one of Shakespeare's best-written fools, and in this production, directed by Peter Hall, he is brought slyly and winningly to life by Andrew Weems. There are some other fine performances (notably, those of Earl Hindman, as Ajax, Thomas M. Hammond, as Aeneas, and Jordan Charney, as a servant) and, as one would expect, some fine directorial touches, but for the most part the production bogs down under the excessively talky script. The basic love story of Troilus and Cressida is neither engaging nor well played, so there is no drama to be had from this truce during the Trojan War. At three and a half hours, it's a long evening. But if you suffer fools gladly it's worth it. (American Place Theatre, 111 W. 46th St. 239-6200. Closes May 13.)

UNCLE BOB
In a new play by Austin Pendleton, George Morfogen portrays a man dying of AIDS and Gale Harold his homophobic nephew. (SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 239-6200.)

URINETOWN: THE MUSICAL
A musical comedy by Mark Hollmann and Greg Kotis, about a city in a state of ecological disaster. John Rando is the director. (American Theatre of Actors, 314 W. 54th St. 239-6200.)

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET
Balanchine's 1951 ballet "La Valse" mixes a Busby Berkeley sumptuousness with E. T. A. Hoffmann-style spookiness. It features a Girl in White who is hungry for trouble: she takes Death as her waltz partner. "We are dancing on the edge of a volcano," Ravel wrote of these increasingly fragmented waltzes. Balanchine, too, sensed vertigo beneath the waltz's complacent rocking, and made a fantastical and frightening story of it. May 9 at 8: "Tributary," "Valse Triste," "Ash," and "Stravinsky Violin Concerto." ♦ May 10 at 7:30: The spring gala, featuring premières of works by Peter Martins and Christopher Wheeldon. ♦ May 11 at 8: "Divertimento No. 15," "Zakouski," "Monumentum Pro Gesualdo/Movements for Piano and Orchestra," and "The Four Seasons." ♦ May 12 at 2: "Ash," "Zakouski," "Variations Sérieuses," and "La Valse." ♦ May 12 at 8: "Jeu de Cartes," "Morgen," and "La Valse." ♦ May 13 at 3: "Variations Sérieuses," "Divertimento No. 15," and "The Concert." ♦ May 15 at 8: "Variations Sérieuses," "Jeu de Cartes," and "La Valse." (New York State Theatre. 870-5570. Through July 1.)

AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE
May 9 at 2 and 8 and May 10 at 8: "Cinderella." ♦ May 11 and May 14-15 at 8 and May 12 at 2 and 8: "Giselle." (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000. Through June 23.)

EIFMAN BALLET OF ST. PETERSBURG
The refreshingly grandiloquent choreographer Boris Eifman takes on two full-length works: "Don Juan & Molière," which presents a battle between shades of the creative subconscious (Mozart plays when Don Juan appears, and Berlioz plays for Molière), and "Russian Hamlet," which recasts Prince Paul, the only son of Catherine the Great, in the moody and self-torturing role. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. May 11 at 8, May 12 at 2 and 8, and May 13 at 2. Through May 20.)

CREATIVE OUTLET DANCE THEATRE
If you happen to wander into the basketball gym at P.S. 113, in Brooklyn, on a weekday afternoon, you're likely to find dancers so accomplished and athletic that if the action were in fact basketball they wouldn't be practicing *here*. The twelve members of the troupe bring a swift, elastic precision and an unforced, utterly convincing theatricality to the artistic director Jamel Gaines's jazz-modern style. Although the program this weekend is mainly secular, it should be easy to spot the influence of those Sundays when the Brooklyn-based company heads over to St. Paul's Community Baptist Church, in East New York, and performs original pageants before the Reverend Dr. Johnny Ray Youngblood's huge congregation. This Easter, the dancers did a number called "He Got Up." (651 Arts, BAM's Harvey Theater, 651 Fulton St. 718-636-4100. May 10-12 at 8.)

AMERICAN REPERTORY BALLET
The twenty-two-member company, under the direction of Graham Lustig, offer two programs of assorted repertory, including "Fandango Furioso," choreographed by Kirk Peterson, and Lustig's "Silkscreens." (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. May 8-11 at 8, May 12 at 2 and 8, and May 13 at 2 and 7:30.)

CURT HAWORTH AND AMANDA LOULAKI
The two choreographers share an evening, with Haworth offering "Static" and "Step Right Up," which aims to liberate the carnival barker hidden in every performer. Loulaki counters with "There Is Something Under My Couch," a quartet performed to music by Tricky, Nick Cave, and Kid Loco. (Danspace Project, St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 674-8194. May 11-13 at 8:30.)

"MEDITATIONS OF A DRUNKEN PEACOCK"
The choreographer H. T. Chen sets his musings on eight performers taken from the dance program at Fiorello LaGuardia High School. (Mulberry Street Theatre, 70 Mulberry St. 349-0438. May 9-12 at 8.)

BILL T. JONES/ARNIE ZANE DANCE COMPANY
The troupe concludes its four-year residency at Aaron Davis Hall with repertory works and the première of "The Table Project," in which two groups of amateur dancers—six adult men and six young girls from Harlem—perform the same movements in sequence. (Davis Hall, City College, Convent Ave. at 134th St. 650-7148. May 11-12 at 8.)

"TWELVE"
The choreographer Paz Tanjuaquio presents an evening-length work that considers the many uses of the number, in mathematics, myth, and music. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288. May 10-13 at 8:30.)

"MOTHER TONGUE"
The dancer Tami Stronach performs the title solo, recalling her childhood in Iran, whose language she grew up with and has now forgotten. "Love Particles," Stronach's work for five women, investigates first kisses. The evening ends with duets improvised between Stronach and Neta Pulvermacher, or between Tony Ramos and Stephen Petronio or Neil Greenberg. (Williamsburg Art Nexus, 205 North 7th St., Brooklyn. 718-599-7997. May 11-12 at 8.)

NIGHT LIFE
CONCERTS

"SINGERS OVER MANHATTAN"
Milt Grayson, an Ellington-band alumnus who is now the sonorous singer for the Lincoln Center Orchestra, splits sets with **Marlena Shaw**, a vocalist whose pop inclinations will presumably be put on hold for shows organized by Jazz at Lincoln Center. The pianist **Eric Reed** and his trio provide support for both artists. (Kaplan Penthouse, Rose Building, Lincoln Center. 721-6900. May 10-12 at 8 and May 13 at 6.)

"HIGHLIGHTS IN JAZZ"
This celebration of the music of Louis Armstrong has enough of his associates, including the bassist **Arvell Shaw** and the pianists **Marty Napoleon** and **Joe Bushkin**, to give this concert some real lift. (Pace Downtown Theatre, Spruce St. between Nassau and Gold Sts. 346-1715. May 10 at 8.)

WORLD MUSIC INSTITUTE
A festival of *dhrupad*, the deeply contemplative music of northern India, with Wasifuddin Dagar on May 11 and Bahauddin Dagar on May 12. (Washington Square Church, 135 W. 4th St. 545-7536. Both shows are at 8.)

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (533-2111)—May 10: With his band of grunge heavyweights on seemingly endless hiatus, **Jerry Cantrell,** the flaxen-maned Alice in Chains guitarist, continues to pursue a solo career. While not strikingly different from the menacing heaviness of Alice in Chains, Cantrell's music (which some are regrettably dubbing "postgrunge") mines a calmer, more melodic vein, although it's still mighty big on metallic power chords. May 11-12: The crooked grin and dusty-booted songs of **Jerry Jeff Walker,** who is perhaps still best known for his early-seventies ode to a fellow named Bojangles.

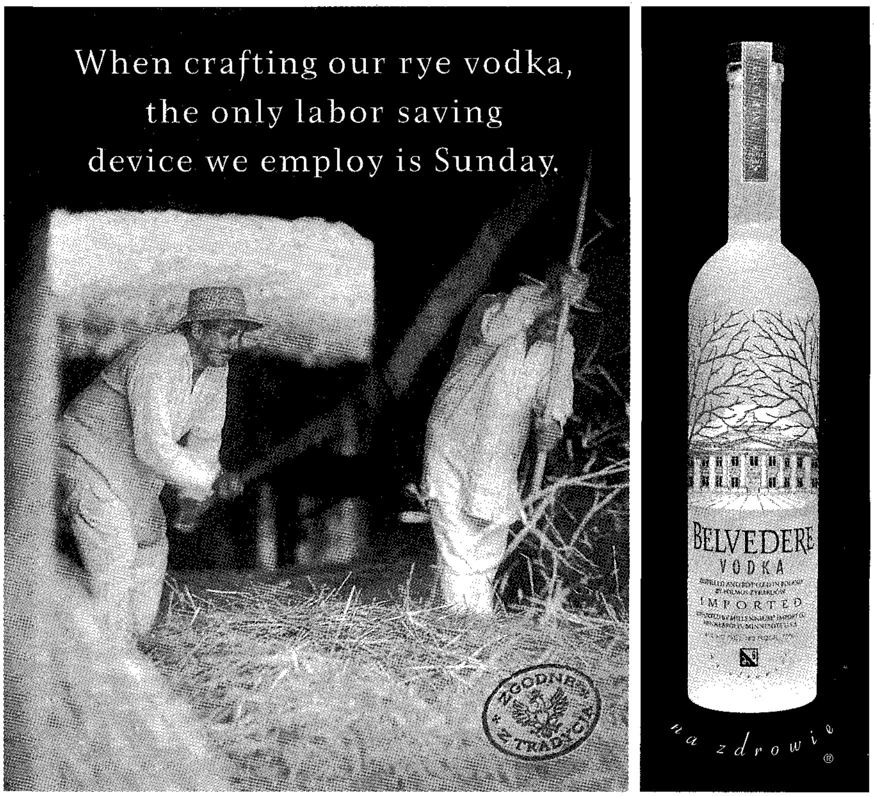
BROWNIES
169 Avenue A, at 10th St. (420-8392)—May 11: The vocalist and guitarist Marcellus Hall and the percussionist Dave Varenka are veterans of Railroad Jerk, the endearing combo with a pregrunge sound. In their band **White Hassle,** the pair, along with the guitarist Matt Oliverio, reach back even farther in time, to the days when radios had transistors and country music meant Hank Williams, Sr. But they are not earnestly nostalgic—with spoons, pots and pans, and the energy of teen-age punks, they take the songs apart and put them back together in completely new ways. With **New Wet Kojak,** the oddly named offshoot of the more conventionally punky band Girls Against Boys.

CHICAGO B.L.U.E.S.
73 Eighth Ave., at 13th St. (924-9755)—May 12: **Levon Helm.** The former Band drummer/vocalist and sometime actor ("Coal Miner's Daughter") comes to town with his rootsy pedigree and a deep back catalogue of material.

FEZ
380 Lafayette St. (533-7000)—May 11: Brooklyn's **Barbez** binds together *musette,* tango, punk, and klezmer to create Brecht-flecked café rock for sophisticated audiences. A small, potent Russian singer and a violinist (along with the occasional guest cellist and a dancer) add to the dramatic resonance. With the **Moonlighters,** a charming local band (two singers, two ukuleles, an upright bass, and a steel guitar, the last played exquisitely by the former Helmet bassist Henry Bogdan), which favors swinging Hawaiian tunes from the twenties and thirties, along with originals in the same style. The **Mingus Big Band** still packs them in every Thursday. Dining.

IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—May 9: Back from a spell of relative inactivity and dabbling in other bands, Richard and Tim Butler have reconvened their iconic eighties band, the **Psychedelic Furs.** Having provided the soundtrack to many a once-hip thirtysomething's youth (and the occasional title track to a John Hughes film), the Furs are certain to bring the house down with their more histrionic hits, such as "Love My Way," "Pretty in Pink," or "The Ghost in You." For some, it will be as if high school never ended and the nineties never were. May 13: Since he decapitated the Talking Heads in 1988, the geek messiah **David Byrne** has succumbed to global wanderlust and spent much of his time releasing non-Western music on his own eclectic Luaka Bop label. When he wasn't also busy dispelling rumors of a Heads reunion, he produced a string of respectable if not wildly successful Latin-tinged solo efforts. Out to promote his new album, "Look Into the Eyeball," Byrne may sprinkle his intercontinental set with the odd Talking Heads chestnut, but don't expect the big suit.

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—May 9: **Damon & Naomi.** Damon Krukowski and Naomi Yang once formed two-thirds of the sleepy yet seminal New York trio Galaxie 500. After an acrimonious split with the vocalist/songwriter Dean Wareham in 1991 (Wareham went on to form the comparatively very successful Luna), the pair stayed on their whisper-quiet, melancholy tra-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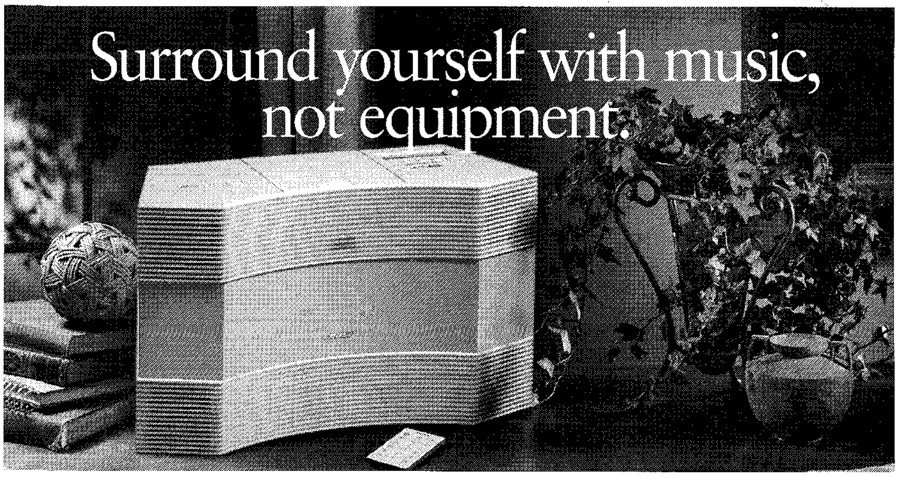

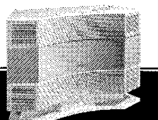

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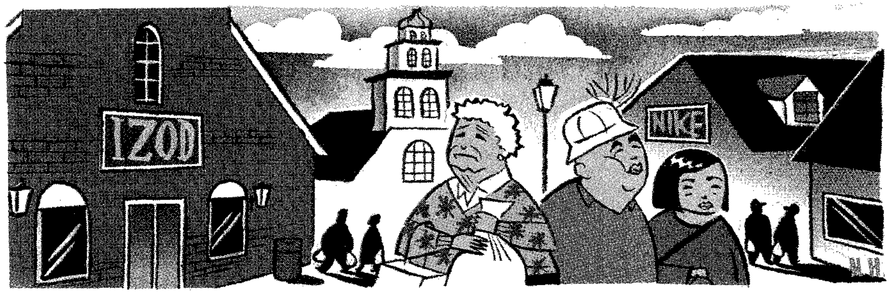
ON AND OFF THE AVENUE

Common Ground



MARCELLUS HALL

Although he seems to be circling hot picks on a racing form, the French guy with the cashmere sweater draped over his shoulders on the ShortLine bus to Woodbury Common Premium Outlets is actually hunched over the shopping center's brochure, ticking off which of the complex's two hundred and twenty stores he wants to visit. Woodbury Common—a squeaky-clean faux-Colonial village in upstate New York which looks like the set of a David Lynch movie—may not be much admired by Manhattanites who haunt Madison Avenue shops, but the place has cast a spell on modish foreigners, who make the line at Gate 310 of the Port Authority bus terminal look like the queue for the Hamptons jitney.

An hour out of the city, the bus pulls up just outside Woodbury Common's town square, and the passengers, among them a Muslim gentleman with two heavily robed women, an Italian lady with a steely expression and a huge Chanel carryall, and a Japanese couple with matching Vuitton pouches, head straight for the Grapevine and Red Apple Courts, where the best shops—Malo and Judith Leiber, Waterford Wedgwood and Royal Doulton—are clustered. Woodbury Common visitors don't share a common language, but the international sound of shopping is everywhere audible, from the "Ooh!" of the Korean girl with the Marianne Faithfull hair swooning over a shelf of daisy-strewn Fendi clutches ($379, originally $1,250) to the whisper of hands rifling a table of cut-rate wallets at the Gucci outlet. Not every store is so frenetic. Despite an inauspicious location, next to a hot-dog kiosk, the new Frette linen shop is as serene as the company's Upper East Side boutique. A young fellow plies the refined saleswoman with questions—"What color should I buy?" "Must sheets always match?"—while another patron seems content with a bed set (two sheets, two shams), in which all the pieces are an identical celadon-trimmed écru ($392, originally $900).

No matter how disciplined the customer, discount shopping can be a battle between practicality and frivolity. Though most of the people on the cashier's line at Le Creuset are lugging the company's famous enamelled-cast-iron skillets, more than one throws a longing glance in the direction of a deep-green duck terrine with a *canard*-shaped lid ($84, originally $140). At Villeroy & Boch, another hushed enclave, there is plenty of reduced-price china and stemware to pick from, but there is also a pair of winsome lime-green salt and pepper shakers whose flattened forms reprise the contours of a computer mouse. By 4:30 P.M., the line for the bus back to Manhattan has outgrown the shelter and snakes halfway to Woodbury Common's weathervane-topped tower. No one is going home empty-handed: the Muslim ladies are almost invisible behind a stack of Etro bags; the Italian woman with the Chanel tote is the new owner of a purse from the Prada outlet. Inside the bus, at least one shopper gives in to the impulse to review the triumphs of the day: a young woman wearing gold-tipped sneakers and flower-appliquéd nail polish opens an outsized Fendi shopping bag and retrieves a lavender pashmina shawl, snuggling contentedly as the bus whizzes back to Port Authority. (Woodbury Common, Central Valley. 845-928-4000.)

—*Lynn Yaeger*

jectory until they joined forces with the enigmatic Japanese psychedelia band Ghost last year for an acclaimed album. With the Ghost guitarist **Michio Kurihara's** mystical string-bending services, expect a delightful evening of somnambulistic shenanigans. May 11: Prototypical progenitors of digital hardcore (a thorny subgenre of techno which fuses implausibly speedy beats with the sonic fury of punk rock), the German duo **EC8OR** practice a shrill, purposely unlistenable, and unintentionally hilarious brand of agitprop. Despite the fact that they stock their Spartan arsenal with crude samplers instead of actual guitars, EC8OR are no less ferocious than a typical speed-metal band as they zealously rail against "the system" in broken English with such galvanizing fist-pumpers as "I Won't Pay" and "We Are Pissed." Earplugs and a sense of humor are essential.

MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—May 11-12: **Alejandro Escovedo** played punk in the seventies and has since carved out a critically acclaimed career as a singer-songwriter. The Austin-based Escovedo favors world-weary homilies, but his new album, "A Man Under the Influence," is surprisingly romantic. May 14: Born in Wales, raised in Brittany, and currently living in New York City and Dublin, **Katell Keineg** has a voice with as wide a range as her background.

SHINE
285 West Broadway, at Canal St. (941-0900)—May 11: **Olu Dara,** a Mississippi-born avant-garde jazz cornettist who's also proven adept at the blues guitar, stops by with songs from his smoking new release, "Neighborhoods."

VILLAGE UNDERGROUND
130 W. 3rd St. (777-7745)—May 11: **Peter Rowan,** a master of high lonesome who came of age in Bill Monroe's Blue Grass Boys, shares the bill with Ithaca's delightful touring band **Donna the Buffalo.** May 12: **Jon Cleary,** the British blues-keyboard player with a penchant for the music of New Orleans. May 15: The country singer and former Outlaw **Billy Joe Shaver.** Better known as a songwriter—his tunes have been recorded by Waylon Jennings, the Allman Brothers, Jerry Lee Lewis, and Elvis, to name a few—this native of Corsicana, Texas, is touring in support of his latest record, "The Earth Rolls On," which he recorded last year with his son Eddy on guitar. Sadly, Eddy won't be here for this show; he died of a heroin overdose on New Year's Eve.

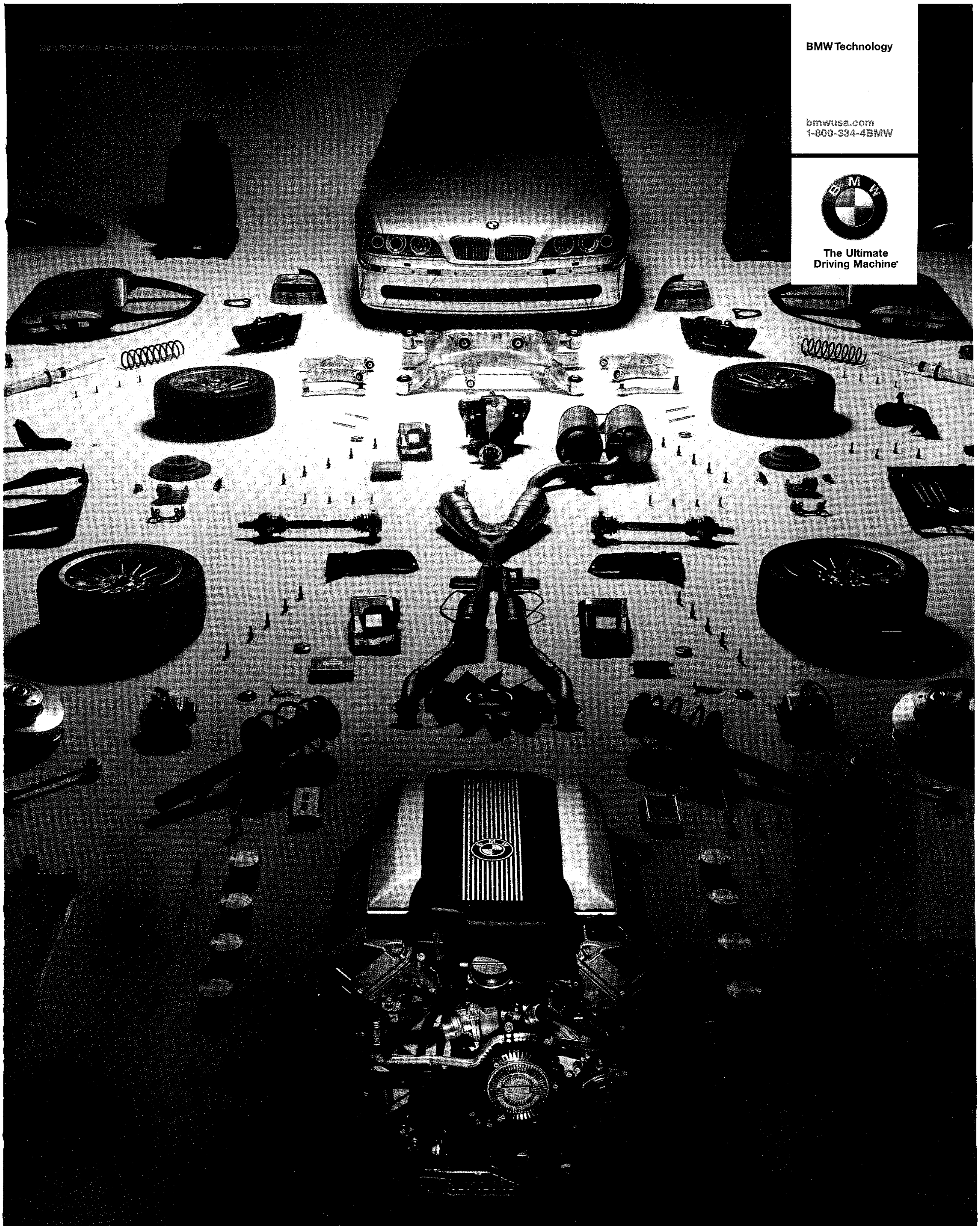
JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (581-3080)—He may be the world's most famous jazz bassist, but being a perennial gun for hire has never been enough for **Ron Carter** (here May 9-12). A fine composer and a crafty bandleader—the nucleus of the celebrated band Sphere was once his rhythm section—Carter is now leading a nonet, which should provide him with all the tonal coloring he needs to present his case as a significant artist. Dining.

CARLYLE HOTEL
Madison Ave. at 76th St. (744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound pastel murals, and, through June 23, the magisterially puckish **Bobby Short.** ♦ Across the hall, in Bemelmans Bar, **Barbara Carroll** is in attendance at the piano through June 23.

FEINSTEIN'S AT THE REGENCY
540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (339-4095)—Playing straight woman to her then-husband Louis Prima during that wild man's fifties heyday gave **Keely Smith** (here through May 26) permanent neo-hipster status, but her superior talents as a mainstream vocalist are still undervalued. "Keely Sings Sinatra," a stirring recording of favorites of the Chairman of the Board, provides the focus for this welcome return to a major New York City club.

IRIDIUM
48 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—Through May 13: The lip problems that have troubled **Freddie Hubbard's** trumpet playing for the past few years may be under control, but his hit-'em-out-of-the-ballpark days are



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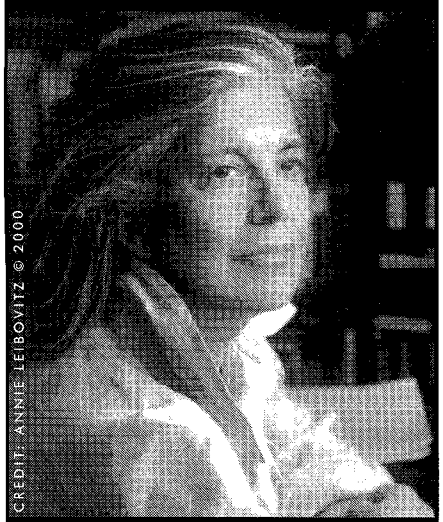
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SUSAN SONTAG

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What to Read Next

PICADOR USA

nonetheless behind him. Still, there's plenty of music left in this hard-bop hero, and he gets sturdy support from such younger players as the saxophonists **Craig Handy** and **Myron Walden** as well as the superb veteran drummer **Joe Chambers.** Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

JAZZ GALLERY
290 Hudson St., near Spring St. (242-1063)—May 11: Two of the more adventurous younger pianists, **James Hurt** and **Vijay Iyer,** come together in an ensemble dubbed Saturn Returns, an attempt to find common—which is to say, pungently diverse—ground. May 14: Anyone who's witnessed the trombonist **Frank Lacy** (here on Mondays) tearing up the bandstand with McCoy Tyner, Steve Turre, and other jazz notables can have little doubt that the rambunctious musician will turn on the heat with his own band, the fourteen-piece Vibe Tribe.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (576-2232)—Through May 13: The **Bennie Wallace** quartet. Although he came on like a bruising avant-gardist when he hit town in the late seventies, the Southern tenor saxophonist Wallace is now firmly in touch with his inner Ben Webster. He's one of the better ballad players of his generation, and his solid bear-hug tone can rattle a club's walls. Dining.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through May 13: While not exactly the contemporary versions of Lester Young and Billie Holiday, the tenor saxophonist **Houston Person** and the vocalist **Etta Jones** make fetching music together, a tradition that started more than thirty years ago. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—William Blake (1757-1827) is best known as a poet, but his gifts as a visual artist were prodigious as well. Apprenticed to an engraver by the age of fifteen, he went on to develop an innovative printing technique (which he claimed came to him in a vision) that enabled him to self-publish such illuminated texts as "Songs of Innocence" and "Songs of Experience." The copper-etching plates and pages from the books cover one long wall of an extensive show that includes more than a hundred and seventy-five works. Through June 24. ♦ With fifteen paintings by Vermeer (and possibly a sixteenth, "Young Woman Seated at a Virginal," which has his luminously impersonal touch), five by the tragically short-lived Fabritius, who may have been his teacher, and ten by his great rival De Hooch, **"Vermeer and the Delft School"** offers an encyclopedic look at the milieu that formed the calmest genius of the seventeenth century. This is the Met at its best: a stately procession of masterpieces, accompanied by informative, sometimes tart commentary. Through May 27. ♦ At the Costume Institute: **"Jacqueline Kennedy: The White House Years—Selections from the John F. Kennedy Library and Museum."** Through July 29. ♦ (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—**"Van Gogh's Postman: The Portraits of Joseph Roulin."** Through May 15. ♦ A retrospective exhibition of the radiant, mural-size color photographs of Andreas Gursky. Through May 15. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, and Thursdays, 10:30 to 5:45; Fridays, 10:30 to 8:15.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—Selections from the permanent collection are on display. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 9 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 9 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—**"BitStreams,"** the museum's survey of digitally enhanced art work, features photographs, videos, digitally designed sculptures, and a generous sampling of sound works. Through June 10. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BOOK CURRENTS
When She Sails

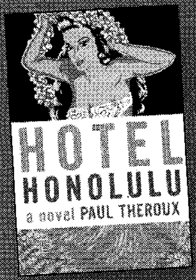
MICHAEL KUPPERMAN

Seafaring is generally seen as an exclusively male pursuit. Yet David Cordingly's **WOMEN SAILORS AND SAILORS' WOMEN** (Random House) claims that "a surprising number of women went to sea," either to spend time with husbands they were sick of never seeing or to escape conventional society altogether by adopting men's clothes and swashbuckling personae. The latter category includes Hannah Snell, who was severely wounded during her service as a British marine, in the middle of the eighteenth century. After revealing her identity, Snell capitalized on her celebrity with London stage appearances.

More famous still are the eighteenth-century pirates Anne Bonny and Mary Read, who were taken captive in the West Indies in 1720. **IRON MEN, WOODEN WOMEN,** edited by Margaret S. Creighton and Lisa Norling (Johns Hopkins), reprints the original account of their exploits. When their ship was captured, Bonny and Read were practically the only crew members to put up a fight, and Read even shot at her cowering deckmates. Bonny, for her part, took leave of her captain and lover, Calico Jack Rackham, the day he was executed, saying that "if he had fought like a Man, he need not have been hang'd like a Dog."

In **BOLD IN HER BREECHES** (Pandora) the editor Jo Stanley is wary of glamorizing the subject and turning every female brigand into "Mrs. Thatcher with a cutlass." Stanley and her fellow-contributors delve into the legends of such piratical sisters as Artemisia (Queen of Halicarnassus around 480 B.C.), Alfhild (a fifth-century Danish princess), and the sixteenth-century Irish chieftain-cum-pirate Grace O'Malley. More recent examples include a female crew of brigands who, in 1983, boarded a ship off the West African coast and made off with its laundry.

—*Leo Carey*



SHANGRI-LA

Just off the main drag of paradise lies the Hotel Honolulu: a mecca for a diverse troupe of travelers, each in search of something different.

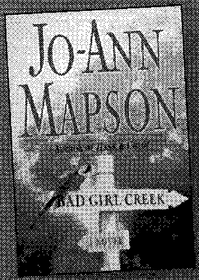
HOTEL HONOLULU
by Paul Theroux
Pub. Price: $26.00
Our Price: $20.80
Readers' Advantage Price: $18.72

CHARADES

An imaginative and inquisitive middle child revisits the mythical terrain of her childhood growing up in an eccentric transatlantic family.

SISTER CRAZY
by Emma Richler
Pub. Price: $22.00
Our Price: $17.60
Readers' Advantage Price: $15.84

sister crazy
emma richler



HOT HOUSE

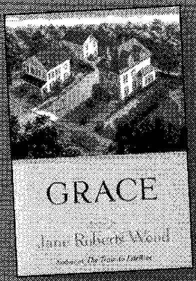
As four displaced women come together to run a flower farm on the California coast, their confidence and courage blossom alongside their new friendship.

BAD GIRL CREEK
by Jo-Ann Mapson
Pub. Price: $24.00
Our Price: $19.20
Readers' Advantage Price: $17.28

HOME FRONT

Four families sharing a block in an east Texas town confront issues of class, money and family over the course of the final year of World War II.

GRACE
by Jane Roberts Wood
Pub. Price: $22.95
Our Price: $18.36
Readers' Advantage Price: $16.52



THE ICE CHILD
ELIZABETH McGREGOR

ARCTIC

The man in Jo Harper's life is obsessed with a doomed Arctic expedition from more than a century ago. His obsession wreaks havoc on their relationship and their very lives.

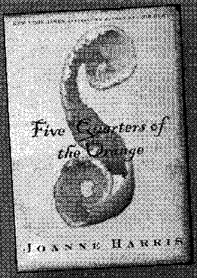
THE ICE CHILD
by Elizabeth McGregor
Pub. Price: $24.95
Our Price: $19.96
Readers' Advantage Price: $17.96

ADIEU

Exploring the dynamics of bidding farewell to a homeland, a child and a marriage, this novel offers insight into the choices we make between duty and desire.

THE LANGUAGE OF GOOD-BYE
by Maribeth Fischer
Pub. Price: $23.95
Our Price: $19.16
Readers' Advantage Price: $17.24

The Language of Good-bye
Maribeth Fischer



CAFÉ

At a café in a Loire village, Framboise serves her mother's recipes that slowly reveal truths about her family's departure during the German occupation.

FIVE QUARTERS OF THE ORANGE
by Joanne Harris
Pub. Price: $25.00
Our Price: $20.00
Readers' Advantage Price: $18.00

KEROUAC

When a rebellious Kerouac-loving woman disappears, her long-smitten schoolteacher sifts through her stories and finally achieves an understanding of his beloved.

SPUTNIK SWEETHEART
by Haruki Murakami
Pub. Price: $23.00
Our Price: $18.40
Readers' Advantage Price: $16.56

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WHITNEY MUSEUM AT PHILIP MORRIS
120 Park Ave., at 42nd St. (878-2550)—Minimalism goes military in this stunning installation by Do-Ho Suh, a Korean-born, New York-based artist. Approximately a hundred thousand metal dog tags tile the gallery floor, overlapping like serpent scales. In the center of the room the tags rise to form a monumental T, conjuring ceremonial armor or an imperial robe. Like a warrior-king with outstretched arms, the site-specific sculpture is both formidable and benevolent. The back side of the object is slit, revealing a mirrored interior that turns viewers' reflections into a lining, just as the anonymous legions implied by the dog tags create the garment itself. Through June 29. (Open weekdays, 11 to 6, and Thursday evenings until 7:30.)

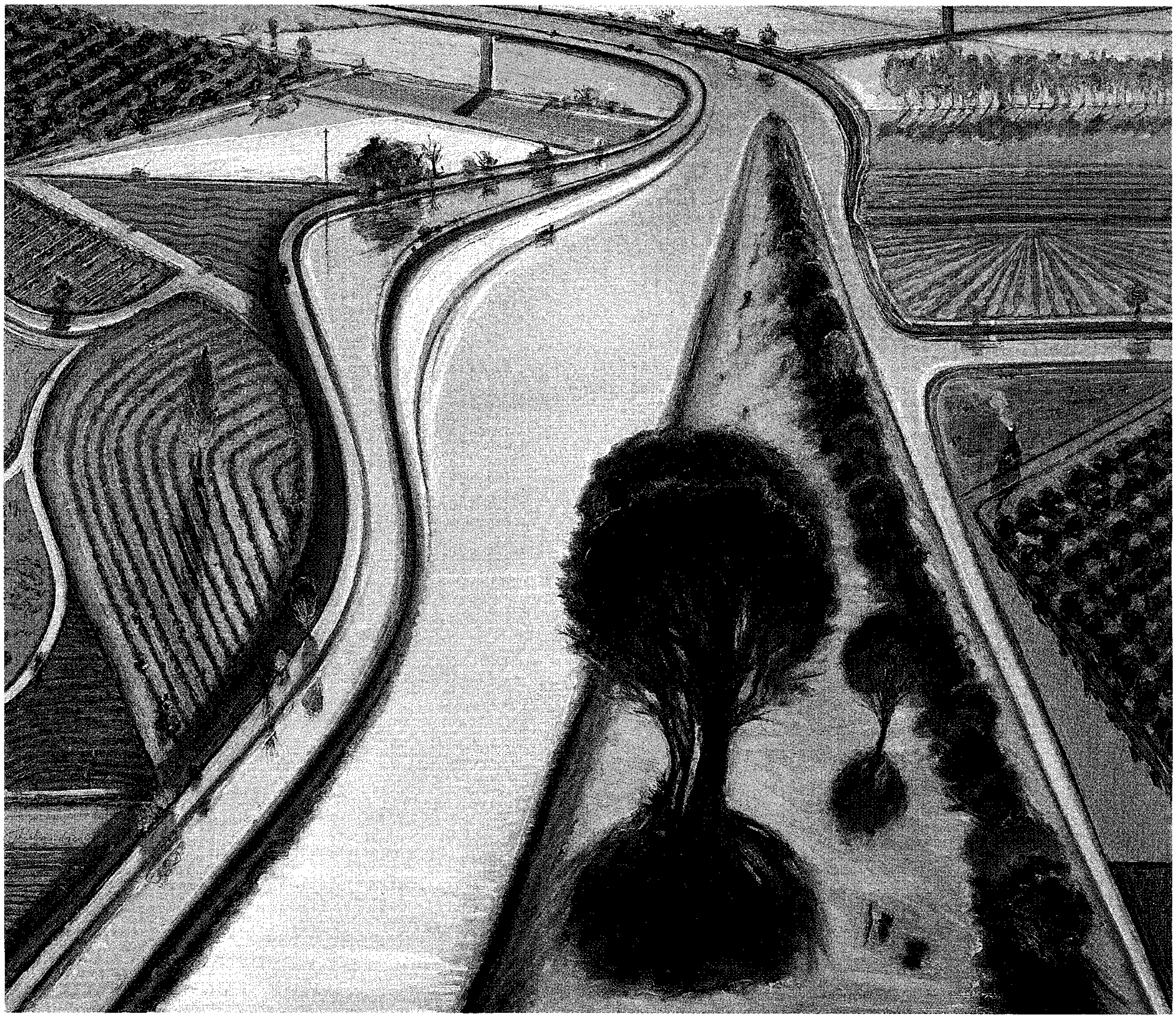
JEWISH MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (423-3200)—**"Voice, Image, Gesture,"** an unusually lively installation selected from the museum's permanent collection, examines postwar Jewish identity through art, ceremonial objects, and enough television clips to earn an Emmy. The show opens with a suite of Warhol prints—ten portraits of twentieth-century Jews from Martin Buber to the Marx Brothers. Across the way the curators riff on Warhol's fifteen minutes of fame with a video montage of eighty Jewish celebrities, including the cast of "Seinfeld" and Gloria Steinem. If this all sounds lowbrow, fans of high culture can find solace in Adolph Gottlieb's Torah curtain or Morris Louis's sombre, calligraphic painting "Charred Journal." Through Aug. 5. (Open Sundays, 10 to 5:45, Mondays through Thursdays, 11 to 5:45 and Tuesday evenings until 9, and Fridays, 11 to 3.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

LOUISE BOURGEOIS
The sly French-American sculptor has been the art world's favorite provocateur for the last couple of decades—so much so that it's easy to forget how good she is. This beautiful show offers a reminder in the form of nineteen slender "Personnages," carved in wood almost fifty years ago and cast in bronze more recently. They're comical, and endlessly evocative—some look like giant Cycladic toothbrushes, others like diced baguettes or Surrealist newel posts—and they have the macabre inventiveness of the great tribal art that apparently inspired them. Through June 9. (C&M, 45 E. 78th St. 861-0020.)

JOHN MOORE
Lately, Moore's high-vantage landscapes have grown trickier, though no less impressive. In the foregrounds, plants or flowers act as visual hurdles, interrupting access to the deep spaces beyond. But Moore's real subject, the equivocal order of the built environment, lies in the middle distance, where he shows us suburbs sprawling across rural hillsides, industrial architecture giving way to office towers, littered woods encroaching on dusky back yards. Moore paints everything—the "everything" you can see out your window right now—with a luminous, Delft-school intricacy. Though June 1. (Hirschl and Adler, 21 E. 70th St. 535-8810.)



WAYNE'S WORLD *Back in the sixties, Wayne Thiebaud's paintings of custards, cakes, hot dogs, and cream pies were gobbled up by a public eager for wry, recognizable icons. Critics—and who can blame them?—linked his sweets to Oldenberg's spoons and Warhol's soup cans. By now, though, it seems clear that Thiebaud never had much in common with the nouvelle cuisine of Pop art. A glance at his subsequent paintings of vertiginous San Francisco streets and sherbety farmland (on view now at the Allan Stone gallery and, in June, in a Whitney retrospective) reminds us that Thiebaud's sunniness is irony-free. He's a traditionalist, albeit one with a light heart and a deliciously heavy touch.—Alexi Worth*

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"EXPANDING TRADITION"
Variations on the theme of Indian miniature painting, curated by Susan Leopold, who includes her own labyrinthine, mirrored sculptures in the mix. Pakistani artist Aisha Khalid is the most faithful to the form, with meticulous, small-scale watercolors that suggest a sly political twist by way of a drapery motif (a reference to the veiled segregation of women known as purdah). Curtains recur in Amy Sillman's scene-stealing "Spring Fever." Chiffon yellow and chalk blue, they part to reveal a riot of rosy daubs which just might be a bowl of cherries. Through May 21. (Deutsche Bank, 31 W. 52nd St. 469-3207.)

Short List

DEBORAH BARRETT
Baumgold, 74 E. 79th St. 861-7338.
Through May 25.
WAYNE THIEBAUD
Stone, 113 E. 90th St. 987-4997. Through July 12.

GALLERIES-CHELSEA

SEAN LANDERS
With these big, calculatedly dopey Picasso knockoffs, the author of "(Sic)" continues to mine his own narcissism, a mother lode if there ever was one. In the accompanying soundtrack, swelling strings reach a crescendo as Landers intones, "Who is the new Picasso? Ladies and gentlemen, it is I. I am who you're looking for—the most significant artist of my time." It wouldn't be funny if it were remotely possible, but Landers's sitcom persona remains insidiously entertaining. Through May 19. (Rosen, 524 W. 24th St. 627-6000.)

JOHN NEWMAN
When it comes to materials, Newman's tabletop sculptures are flamboyantly, almost preeningly eclectic: their ingredients range from jute, resin, and wicker to NASA-fabricated Aerogel. Formally, they share a cartoony dynamism: bulbous extremities stretch and grasp and squeeze each other, as if they were C-clamps from galaxies envisioned by Elizabeth Murray or Terry Gilliam. Together, the fifteen examples, along with twice that many drawings, amount to a Pilates class for the imagination. Through May 26. (Von Lintel & Nusser, 555 W. 25th St. 242-0599.)

KATY SCHNEIDER
In this conservative but quietly thrilling New York début, Schneider looks backward, to Manet and Corot, whose painterly touch she has inherited, and also straight ahead, at her swelling belly and child-cluttered household. The resulting works belie their small size and seemingly prosaic subject matter (kids taking a bath, playing dress-up, running around Mom's easel). They are also impressive for what they don't do: dramatize their virtuosity, or mistake sentimentality for warmth. Family values, Schneider suggests, are about learning to love what you've got. Through May 19. (Tatistcheff, 529 W. 20th St. 627-4547.)

Short List

RICHMOND BURTON
Cheim & Read, 521 W. 23rd St.
242-7727. Through June 9.
MELISSA MEYER
Harris, 529 W. 20th St. 463-9666. Through May 19.
EBRU ÖZSEÇEN
Urbach, 526 W. 26th St. 627-0974.
Through May 12.

GALLERIES-DOWNTOWN

BRETT COOK-DIZNEY
This solo début is a rambling, walk-in autobiography, focussing on Cook-Dizney's cheerful ambivalence about race. Six giant reliquaries spill out over the floor and walls, offering a stoop-sale profusion of family photos, LPs, school reports, typed texts, and ephemera, including a bottle of Curl Activator Cream (a.k.a. Jheri Juice). At the center of each is a Photo-Realist portrait of the artist, executed in spray paint. Cook-Dizney is a deft can controller, but the ensembles depend a little too heavily on the artist's own (genuine) likability. Through May 12. (P.P.O.W, 476 Broome St. 941-8642.)

Short List

IDA APPLEBROOG
Feldman, 31 Mercer St. 226-3232.
Through June 2.

AUCTIONS & ANTIQUES

SOTHEBY'S
May 9 at 10 A.M.: Part II of an auction of modern paintings, drawings, and sculpture from the collection of Stanley J. Seeger. ♦ May 9 at 10:15 A.M. and 2: Part II of an auction of Impressionist and modern art works by Arp, Bonnard, Derain, Hepworth, Chaim Soutine (the portrait "L'Étudiant," from 1921), and many others. ♦ May 10 at 7: Part I of the Impressionist-and-modern auction, including works by Monet, Manet ("La Brune au Seins Nus," from 1872), Picasso, and Moore. ♦ May 15 at 7: Part I of a sale of contemporary art, including works by Bruce Nauman, Donald Judd, and Jeff Koons. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 606-7000.)

CHRISTIE'S
May 9 at 7 and May 10 at 1: Impressionist and modern art. Picasso's 1923 portrait of his first wife, Olga, which has never before been offered at auction, is the highlight of the evening sale, which also includes works by Monet, Gauguin, Degas, and Moore. Paintings by members of the School of Paris, along with sculptures by Degas, Rodin, and Archipenko, are a feature of the day sale. ♦ May 10 at 10 A.M.: Impressionist and modern works on paper. ♦ May 10 at 11 A.M.: Paintings, gouaches, and drawings by Yves Tanguy. ♦ May 11 at 10 A.M.: Modern Japanese paintings. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 636-2000.)

CHRISTIE'S EAST
May 9 at 10 A.M. and 2: Rare objects connected to the world of space exploration, including the original typescript of Yuri Gagarin's report on his spaceflight of April 12, 1961. ♦ May 15 at 1: Postwar and contemporary art. (219 E. 67th St. 606-0400.)

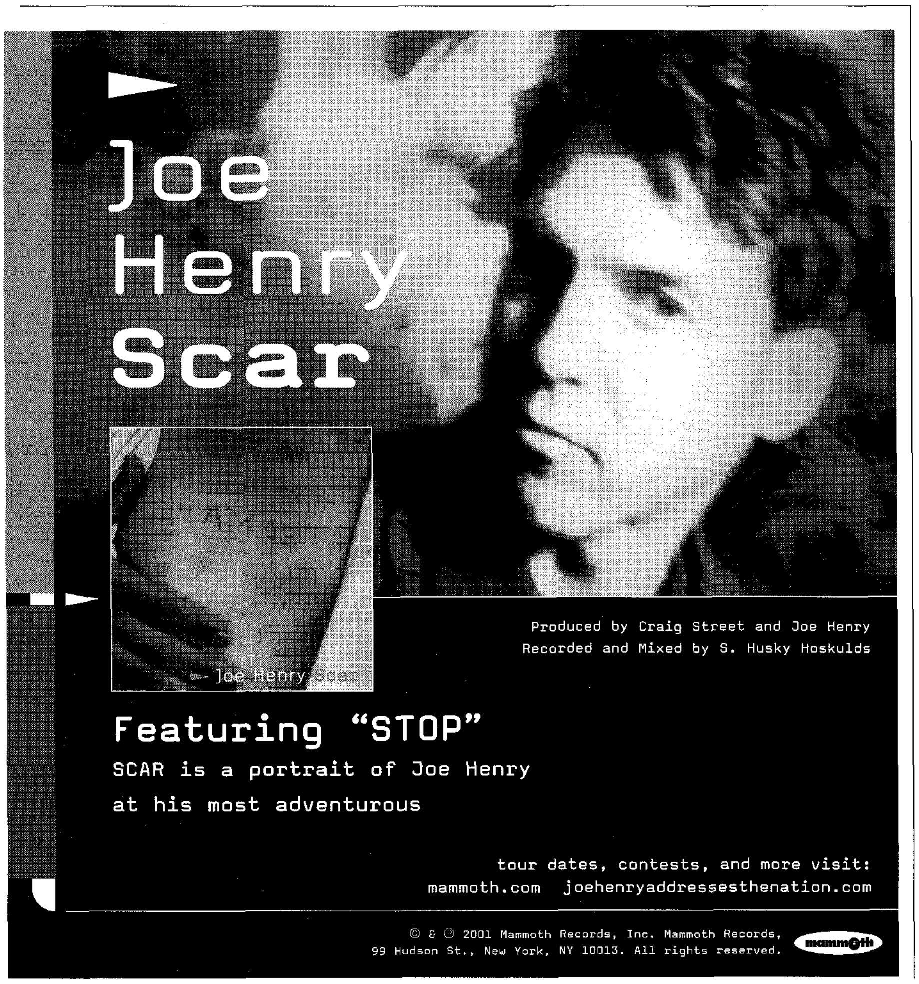
PHILLIPS
May 14 at 7 and May 15 at 10 A.M.: Parts I and II of a sale of contemporary art. The evening sale is notable for its emphasis on weighty, sober art works, not only by modern masters like Dubuffet, de Staël, and Noguchi but by contemporary artists as well: even the Jeff Koons piece ("Flowers," a composition of stainless steel) has an air of gravitas. In contrast, the day sale, which includes paintings and sculptures by Tom Sachs, Elizabeth Peyton, and Julian Schnabel, has a lighter, more insouciant tone; one of the Warhol pieces ("Flowers," a silkscreen on canvas from 1964) is positively serene. (3 W. 57th St. 570-4830.)

DOYLE
May 15 at 1: A sale of items from the estate of Lady Sarah Consuelo Spencer-Churchill, including sculpture, paintings, French eighteenth-century furniture, and Asian porcelain. (175 E. 87th St. 427-2730.)

INTERNATIONAL FINE ART FAIR
The eighth annual fair offers paintings and sculptures from the Renaissance to the nineteen-sixties, by Fragonard, Vlaminck, Frieseke, Picasso, and many others. (7th Regiment Armory, Park Ave. at 66th St. 877-0202. May 11-16.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

LINDA GIRVIN
Most people know lenticular photography from wiggling those old 3-D postcards to make Santa or Elvis dance. Girvin appropriates this gimmicky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mammoth

medium for her decidedly anti-kitsch work, collapsing up to ten fleeting images into each shifty print, which changes with every minute movement of the viewer's head. Her goal seems to be to comment on time itself—and the occasional glimmer of human flesh makes the viewing experience not unlike time spent watching cable television, flipping idly past the scrambled porn channels. Through May 19. (DeWitt, 547 W. 27th St. 695-6845.)

MARK POWER
"Superstructure" follows the development of the Millennium Dome—revealed to be a huge, umbrella-like tent—from its first scaffolding to the packed house of "31 December 1999." Power's sensitive documentation of this strange, state-sponsored project offers a fine example of Blair's "Cool Britannia" at work, raising an eyebrow at itself. Through May 12. (Richardson, 535 W. 22nd St. 343-1255.)

DAN TOROP
Visiting this twenty-nine-year-old's second solo show is like stumbling onto the scene of an art-school critique. Eighteen-by-twenty-four-inch color photographs are tacked casually up on the walls, and four homemade computers hum in the middle of the room. Torop's landscapes (both real and computer-generated) seem clichéd at first, but turn out to be subtle and inventive, yielding a sense of alienation that may take the viewer by surprise. His computers, which produce poetry and virtual landscapes, are less convincing. Through May 19. (Boesky, 535 W. 22nd St. 680-9889.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
Kiki Smith's "Telling Tales" parses fairy stories and childhood myths via photography, sculpture, and video. Hans Bellmer's ever-reassembled dolls and a collection of Victorian daguerreotype portraits of male friends—some of whom look to modern eyes like couples—are also on show. All shows at the Center's Midtown space through June 10. ♦ A survey of Mary Ellen Mark's work will be the last exhibit to appear in the Uptown galleries, which close with the show on June 16. (Uptown: 1130 Fifth Ave., at 93rd St. Midtown: 1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. 860-1777. Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10-5; Fridays, 10-8; Saturdays and Sundays, 10-6.)

Short List

BERND AND HILLA BECHER
Zwirner & Wirth, 32 E. 69th St. 517-8677.
Through May 25.

LEE FRIEDLANDER
"Grand Children": Borden, 560 Broadway. 431-0166. "Serial Portraits": Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 627-6000. Both shows through May 19.

SEIICHI FURUYA
Scalo, 560 Broadway. 334-9393.
Through June 2.

DOUG HALL
Feigen, 535 W. 20th St. 929-0500.
Through June 2.

CHARLES HARBUTT / MAGGIE TAYLOR
Miller, 20 W. 57th St. 397-3930.
Both shows through May 19.

JOHN YANG
Stevenson, 338 W. 23rd St. 352-0070.
Through May 15.

"GESTURE, POSTURE, AND BAD ATTITUDE IN CONTEMPORARY NEWS PHOTOGRAPHY"
Apex, 291 Church St. 431-5270.
Through May 19.

See the museum listings for a photography exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art.

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

MANNES OPERA: "VIVA VERDI"
Young artists of the Mannes College of Music opera program perform scenes from "Rigoletto," "Il Trovatore," "La Traviata," and "Falstaff," under the direction of the Metropolitan Opera conductor Joseph Colaneri. The stage director is Laura Alley. (Kaye Playhouse, Hunter College, Park Ave. at 68th St. 772-4448. May 9-10 at 7:30.)

"THE DIARY OF ANNE FRANK"
The Russian composer Grigori Frid's 1969 solo opera for soprano and chamber ensemble, widely performed in Europe, receives its New York première, sung by the soprano Dunja Pechstein. Nancy Rhodes is the director; Sybille Werner conducts. (Temple Israel, 112 E. 75th St. 726-3113. May 12 and May 15 at 8.)

OPERA ORCHESTRA OF NEW YORK
Donizetti has been the most frequently performed composer of the conductor Eve Queler's long-running series, and "Maria Stuarda" is the second of the composer's operas Queler presents this season, in concert version, at Carnegie Hall. Ruth Ann Swenson is Mary, Queen of Scots; Lauren Flanigan, who earlier this season took the role of Elizabeth I in another Donizetti "queen" opera, "Roberto Devereux," at City Opera, is once again the English monarch. (247-7800. May 13 at 8.)

TABLES FOR TWO

HAMPTON CHUTNEY CO.
68 Prince St. (226-9996)—When the world is finally perfect, all fast food will be healthy and delicious. Until that day arrives, you can make do at this Amagansett-based eatery. The proprietor, Gary MacGurn, lived for five years on an ashram in India, where he mastered the art of making the slightly chewy, addictive sourdough crêpes called *dosai.* Since this is SoHo, MacGurn's version comes with an inventive array of light yet savory fillings that elevate the humble Indian breakfast staple into a perfect quick lunch or dinner after a day of loading up on post-postmodern art or ridiculously expensive shoes.

MacGurn has said that his kitchen resembles an ashram. And so it does. It's airy and open and spotless, and candles burn all day long. The cooks seem almost somnambulant as they ladle circles of fermented rice batter onto hot griddles, sprinkle them with combinations of vegetables, fish, chicken, and cheese, and fold them over loosely like giant, handmade envelopes; they're so in synch with the process that even when a lunch crush wreaks chaos in the dining room it takes only about four minutes to get your *dosai,* which are served practically hanging over the edges of wax-paper-lined cafeteria trays.

This cuisine draws some of the same trend-mongering adherents that modern yoga does, which means that the line to order is clogged with an international crowd of cell-phone-blabbing Prada-wearers. Though the walls are lined with portraits of Swami Chidvalasanda, during the lunch rush there's not a lot of Ashtanga posturing going on; instead it's pushing ("Will you be leaving this table soon?") and posing ("Are you going to produce or direct?").

But never mind. Once the food arrives, everyone meditates on the incomparable experience of *dosai.* The crunchy, tangy wrapper perfectly complements MacGurn's fourteen fillings: the No. 6, classic *masala* (spiced potatoes) with spinach, Jack cheese, and tomato, is the best. But everything else—tuna, avocado, and arugula; Kalamata olive, roasted tomato, onion, arugula, and goat cheese; smoked turkey, spinach, Jack cheese, and balsamic-roasted onion—is satisfying in a way that no burrito or wrap sandwich ever could be. If you can't find a place to sit down, *dosai* are easy to eat on the street. Soup and grilled nan are also available. (Open from 11 A.M. to 8 P.M. daily. Entrées $7-$11.)

—Emily Nunn

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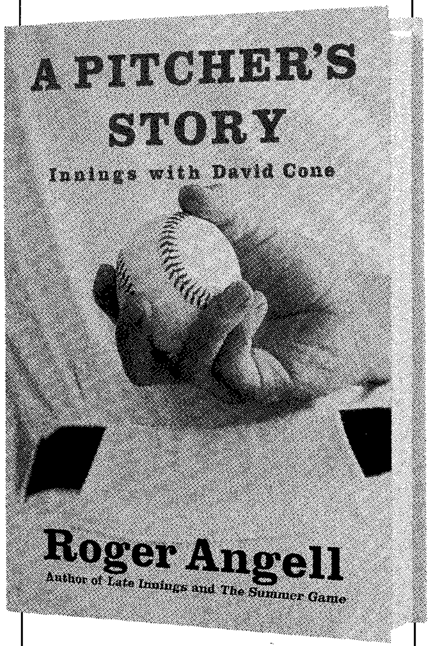
“Angell was born to write about baseball.”

—Wilfred Sheed, *New York Review of Books*



“Angell's love and knowledge of baseball and his truly fascinating subjects make for another win in his long list of hits about the American pastime.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

“Written with Angell's usual economy and intelligence, and with a tact that matches its subject's reticence, this look at an unusual baseball life will appeal to all students of the game—even those who have little use for the Yankees.”

—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)

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ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
The last of the Philharmonic's Schoenberg concerts ends with “Pelleas and Melisande,” an orchestral work based on the same Maeterlinck play that inspired Debussy's opera. Powerfully dramatic and sumptuously orchestrated, it was composed as Schoenberg was taking leave of late-Romantic tonal harmony; the result—a kind of hyperactive, Straussian tone poem with frantic pacing and ridiculously dense counterpoint—is as frustrating as it is seductive. But it should be heard. James Conlon conducts the program, which also includes two works by Wagner: the “Wesendonk” Lieder (in the Hans Werner Henze arrangement, with the mezzo-soprano Stephanie Blythe) and the “Tannhäuser” Overture. (Avery Fisher Hall. 721-6500. May 10-12 at 8.) ♦ The inimitable Bobby McFerrin conducts the last Rush Hour concert of the year, a program of Bernstein (the overture to “Candide”) and Mendelssohn (the “Italian” Symphony). (Avery Fisher Hall. May 15 at 6:45. ♦ **Note:** McFerrin also conducts the last Young People's Concert of the season, which includes excerpts of the Bernstein and Mendelssohn works. May 12 at 2. Avery Fisher Hall.)

WORLD FESTIVAL OF SACRED MUSIC
The second of a pair of concerts, organized by the composer Philip Glass and the WNYC radio host John Schaefer, which celebrate the diversity of sacred-music traditions across the globe. The participants include the Russian Chamber Chorus of New York, the Buddhist Monks of the Drepung Loseling Monastery, Karim Alaoui & Sout al Ghorba (performing Sufi songs from Morocco), and McCullough Sons of Thunder (a twenty-piece gospel “trombone shout band”). (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. May 9 at 8.)

THE DESSOFF CHOIRS
Kent Tritle directs an all-British program, featuring music by Britten, Elgar, Vaughan Williams (the meltingly beautiful “Serenade to Music”), and the Act III “Masque” from Handel's oratorio “Solomon.” (Church of St. Ignatius Loyola, Park Ave. at 84th St. 831-8224, ext. 3. May 11 at 8.)

MANHATTAN SCHOOL OF MUSIC SYMPHONY
In the last concert of the school's season, Zdenek Macal conducts a program of music by Bartók (the Piano Concerto No. 3, with Yu Zhang), Glen Barton Cortese (“Millennium Variations”), and Mussorgsky (“Pictures at an Exhibition,” in the Ravel orchestration). (Borden Auditorium, Broadway at 122nd St. 749-2802, ext. 428. May 12 at 8. No tickets necessary.)

NEW YORK CHAMBER SYMPHONY
Keith Lockhart conducts a program including two Third Symphonies (Schubert's and Ives's), Tchaikovsky's “Rococo Variations” (with the cellist Alisa Weilerstein), and the New York première of Aaron Jay Kernis's Air for Violin and Orchestra (with Alexander Markov). (Alice Tully Hall. 721-6500. May 12 at 8 and May 13 at 2.)

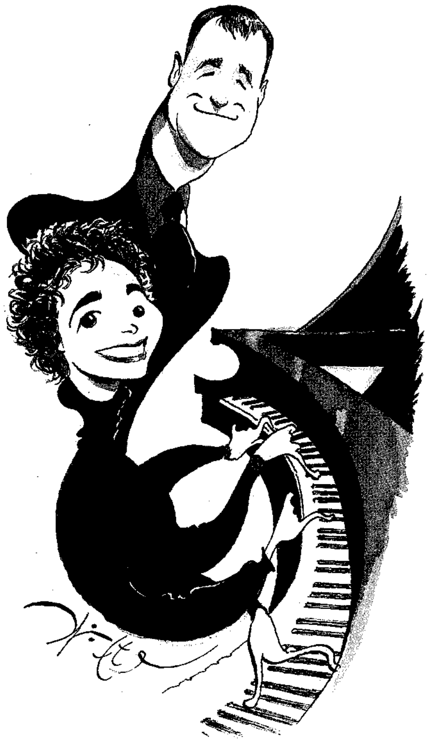
JUPITER SYMPHONY
Jens Nygaard's last program of the season is a charmer, typically combining the familiar with the obscure. Not surprisingly, the music is all Romantic, and all Russian: Dargomïzsky's folk-song fantasy “Baba Yaga” (you may never hear it again), the sweet and inviting Violin Concerto by Arensky (with Alexander Velinzon), and Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 5. (Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church, 152 W. 66th St. 799-1259. May 14 at 2 and 7 and May 15 at 8.)

RECITALS

GUARNERI STRING QUARTET
The legendary American string quartet experiences its first change in personnel: after thirty-seven years on the job, the cellist David Soyer will relinquish his position to Peter Wiley, his distinguished protégé and a longtime member of the Beaux Arts Trio. This is Soyer's last New York concert as part of the quartet; he performs in Beethoven's Quartet in B-Flat Major, Op. 130 (including the “Grosse Fuge”), and shares the stage with Wiley in Schubert's String Quintet in C Major. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. May 9 at 8.)

CLAUDE FRANK
The pianist celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of his New York début with music by Bach, Schubert (the Sonata in B-Flat Major, D. 960), Mozart, and Beethoven (the Sonata No. 32, in C Minor). (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 415-5500. May 10 at 8.)

ROULETTE'S "MIXOLOGY FESTIVAL"
The annual mixed-media series shakes up the downtown scene, with performances by the electronic-music artist David Behrman, the vocalist-composers Meredith Monk and Phoebe Legere, and others. (228 West Broadway. 219-8242. May 10-13 at 8:30.)



The duo-pianists Tal & Groethuysen perform at the Frick Collection on May 13.

MICHAEL WITTE

BARGEMUSIC
May 10 at 7:30 and May 11 at 8: Music by Bach, Schubert (the Trio in B-Flat Major, Op. 99), and Shostakovich, performed by the violinist Mark Peskanov, the cellist Martti Rousi, and the pianist Paul Ostrovsky. The May 11th concert, with a higher ticket price, will be preceded by a cocktail reception at 6. ♦ May 12 at 7:30 and May 13 at 4: Peskanov joins the violist Toby Hoffman and others to perform Glazunov's rarely heard String Quintet in A Major, Op. 39, and Schubert's String Quintet. (Fulton Ferry Landing. 718-624-2083.)

"MUSIC FOR THE SPIRIT"
The soprano Jessica Tranzillo, accompanied on the fortepiano by Gwendolyn Toth, sings music by Haydn. (St. Francis of Assisi Church, 135 W. 31st St. May 10 at 1:15. No tickets necessary.)

FREDERIK ULLÉN
With his three books of piano études, the continually intriguing Hungarian composer György Ligeti has created the only real contemporary equivalent to the grand collections of Scriabin, Chopin, and Liszt; the young Swedish pianist, in his New York début, performs the complete set at the Great Hall of Cooper Union. (Third Ave. at 7th St. 279-4200. May 12 at 7:30.)

TAL & GROETHUYSEN
The Israeli-German piano duo performs music by Schubert, Reger (the “Six Burlesques,” Op. 58), and Mendelssohn. (Frick Collection, 1 E. 70th St. 288-0700. May 13 at 5.)

NEW YORK NEW MUSIC ENSEMBLE
A concert of music by contemporary European composers, including Gérard Grisey, Pierre Boulez ("Dérive I"), Jonathan Harvey, and Karlheinz Stockhausen (the "Schlagtrio," for piano and percussion). (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. May 14 at 8.)

CATHERINE MALFITANO
Fresh from singing in Janáček's "The Makropulos Case," at the Met, the soprano performs standards by Arlen, Gershwin, and Weill, with some William Bolcom tunes thrown in for good measure. (Joe's Pub, Public Theatre, 425 Lafayette St. 239-6200. May 14 at 8:30.)

PIERRE BOULEZ WORKSHOP CONCERT
The legendary composer-conductor's fifth Carnegie Hall workshop for composers, conductors, and instrumentalists concludes with an all-Boulez concert at Weill Recital Hall, coached by Boulez and members of his formidable Ensemble Intercontemporain. The performers include the violinist Timothy Fain and the contralto Julia Bentley. (247-7800. May 14 at 8.)

ROBERT TAUB
The pianist concludes his series of Beethoven concerts, performing four of the composer's sonatas (including the "Appassionata"). (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. May 15 at 8; the concert is preceded by a lecture at 7:15, and is followed by a discussion with the audience.)

JONATHAN DIMMOCK
The organist performs Bach's "Clavierübung III" at the Church of the Holy Apostles with the church's choir. (Ninth Ave. at 28th St. 807-6799. May 15 at 8.)

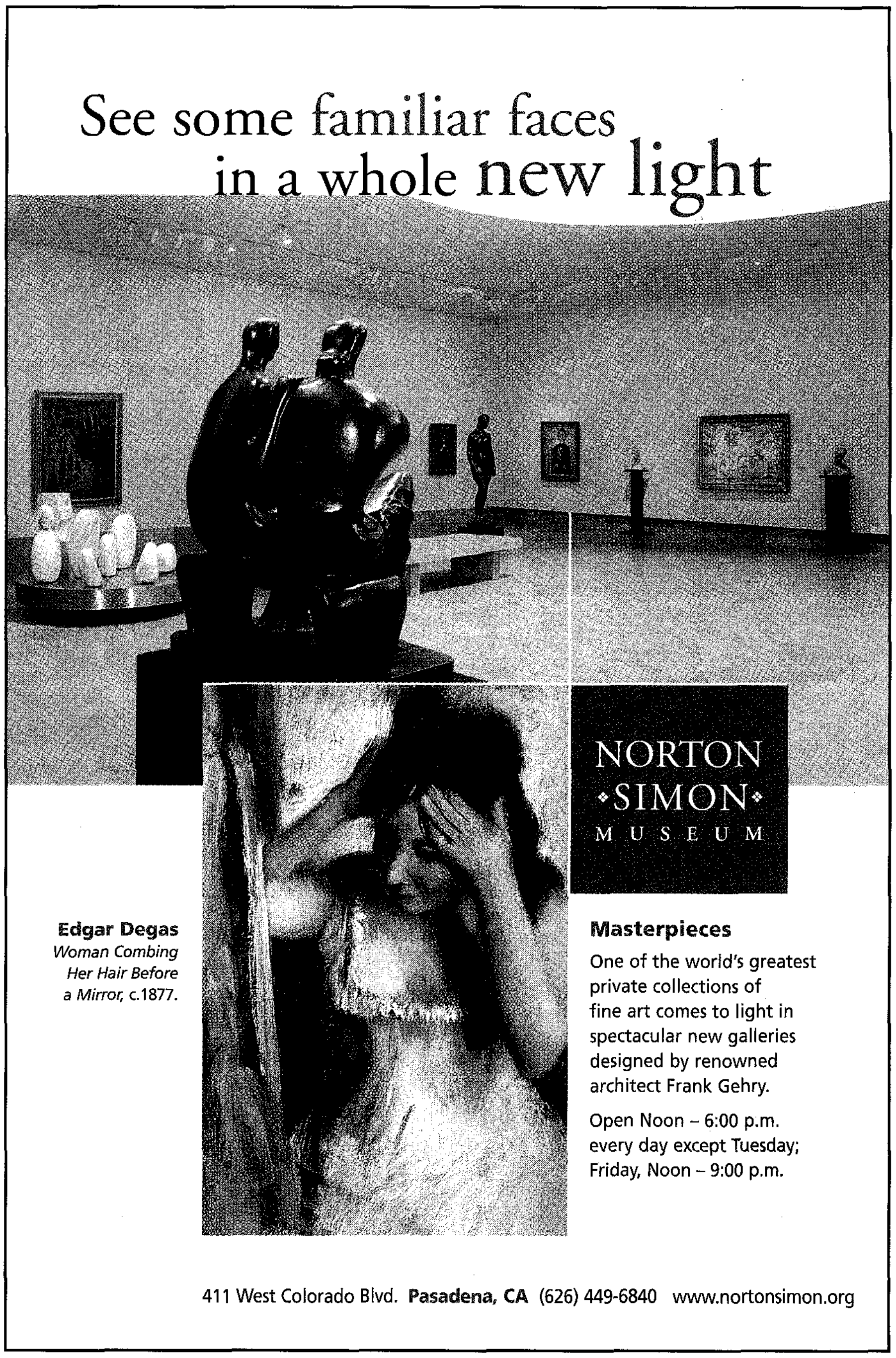
LEON FLEISHER
Jaime Laredo and Sharon Robinson, the violinist and cellist of the Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio, join their guest pianist (along with the violist Michael Tree) in music by Brahms, Dohnányi (the Serenade in C Major), and Schubert. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 415-5500. May 15-16 at 8.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

READINGS
May 9 at 6:30: By the actors Angelina Phillips, Tim Guinee, and Cherry Jones, from the stories of Larry McMurtry, Judy Troy, and Lynna Williams. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 864-5400.) ♦ May 9 at 8: By the Beat poet Diane di Prima, from her memoir, "Recollections of My Life as a Woman," and by Gary Lenhart, from his poetry. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. Tickets at the door.) ♦ May 14 at 7:30: By the poets Star Black and David Lehman. (K.G.B., 85 E. 4th St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ May 15 at 8: By Bill Wasik, Patrick Borelli, Karyn Coughlin, and other members of the Encyclopedia Collective, from their new work on their fictitious volumes. (Barrio, 99 Stanton St., between Ludlow and Orchard Sts. Tickets at the door.)

TALKS
May 9 at 6: Serinity Young, the author of "Dreaming in the Lotus: Buddhist Dream Narrative, Imagery, and Practice," discusses the roles of Tantric consorts in Buddhism. (Margaret Liebman Berger Forum, New York Public Library, Fifth Ave. at 42nd St. For reservations, which are required, call 930-0084.) ♦ May 9 at 6:30: The Japanese architect Kisho Kurokawa talks about the work of Frank Lloyd Wright. (Japan Society, 333 E. 47th St. 832-1155.) ♦ May 15 at 5:30: Peter Filichia, a theatre critic for the Newark *Star-Ledger*, moderates a discussion with Betty Comden and Adolph Green and Faith Prince, who is currently starring in a revival of Comden and Green's 1956 musical, "Bells are Ringing." (The Dramatists Guild, 1501 Broadway, between 43rd and 44th Sts. For reservations, which are required, call 398-9366, ext. 11.)

TOUR
May 12 from 1 to 5: The Brooklyn Heights Association offers a self-guided stroll through the nineteenth-century homes in the neighborhood. For more information, call 718-858-9193.



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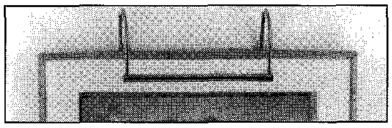

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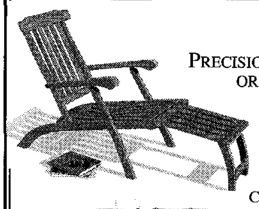

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MOVIES OPENING

ABOUT ADAM
Kate Hudson and Stuart Townsend play the leads in a romantic comedy set in Dublin. Written and directed by Gerard Stembridge. Opening May 9.

CALLE 54
Tito Puente, Jerry Gonzáles, Chano Domínguez, and other stars of Latin music appear in a documentary directed by Fernando Trueba. Opening May 11.

THE KING IS ALIVE
Eleven bus passengers stranded in the African desert decide to stage "King Lear" in a Dogma '95 film written and directed by Kristian Levring. The ensemble cast includes Janet McTeer and Jennifer Jason Leigh. Opening May 11.

A KNIGHT'S TALE
A medieval adventure story in which a low-born serf (Heath Ledger) enters jousting contests to win the heart of a princess. Written and directed by Brian Helgeland. Opening May 11.

THE MAN WHO BOUGHT MUSTIQUE
Joseph Bullman and Vikram Jayanti directed this documentary about Lord Glenconner (a.k.a. Colin Tennant), a Scottish nobleman who bought a tiny Caribbean island in 1956. Opening May 9. (Film Forum.)

STARTUP.COM
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening May 11. (Film Forum.)

TIME AND TIDE
Reviewed below in Film Notes. Opening May 11. (Village East Cinemas.)

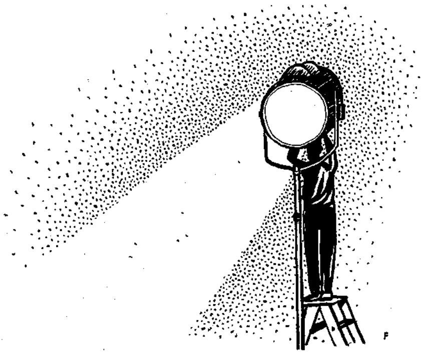
THE TRUMPET OF THE SWAN
An animated version of E. B. White's novel about a mute trumpeter swan, with the voices of Jason Alexander, Carol Burnett, Mary Steenburgen, and Reese Witherspoon. Opening May 11.

UNDER HELLGATE BRIDGE
Michael Sergio directed this story of heroin addiction set in Astoria, Queens. With Jonathan LaPaglia, Dominic Chianese, and Vincent Pastore. Opening May 11.

FILM NOTES

AMORES PERROS
This three-part tale, the début directorial effort of Alejandro González Iñárritu, gives you a pretty good idea of what life is like in Mexico City and an enduring wish never to drive its streets at rush hour. The first section chronicles the near-incestuous affair between Octavio (Gael García Bernal) and his sister-in-law Susana (Vanessa Bauche). The second, which sags with weary symbolism, is about a model who loses a leg. The third and strongest tells of an ex-terrorist and tramp (Emilio Echevarría). The connective tissue between these folks is a car crash, and each of them also either owns or trains dogs. Iñárritu's style may be heated and hectic, but he doesn't bully you into judging these frazzled figures, and, in Echevarría, he has found a figure of great and grimy nobility. In Spanish.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 4/2/01.) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Empire 25, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Union Square.)

BLOW
The story of George Jung—a Massachusetts man who sold the Medellín cartel's cocaine to mainstream America in the seventies—would seem to offer a perfect star vehicle for Johnny Depp, but the unconvincing narrative doesn't allow him to shape a performance. The director, Ted Demme, and the screenwriters, David McKenna and Nick Cassavetes, tell the story of George's rise as a series of semi-comic riffs on his unwittingness—how casually he operated, how oblivious he was to risk and treachery on all sides. The scenes are flimsily staged—thin and underdone. Now and then Demme throws in the towel and resorts to a rapid montage of shots meant to convey the giddy drug life, but this isn't directing; it's more like flinging a loosely pasted scrapbook onto the floor and asking the audience to sort it out.—*David Denby* (4/9/01) (Battery Park 16, Empire 25, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)



BRIDGET JONES'S DIARY
Helen Fielding's creation has finally arrived onscreen; in place of her wiry, worried tone we now find an almost confident pleasure in mishaps and man-hunting. The director, Sharon Maguire, has shaped the fretful original into a basic romantic comedy, leaving an aching Bridget (Renée Zellweger) with a choice of nice Mr. Darcy (Colin Firth) or dastardly Daniel Cleaver (Hugh Grant). These three leads are much better than the movie they front; some of the secondary characters are dangerously thin, although Jim Broadbent is as crumpled and reliable as ever in the role of our heroine's dad. Bridget mania, meanwhile, shows no signs of abating, but one hopes that this film might herald the end of the affair; after all, self-pity has its limitations as the engine of drama, and the idea that a young woman might be not just unhappy but somehow incomplete without a man would have struck even Jane Austen as laughably passé.—*A.L.* (4/16/01) (Battery Park 16, Cinema I, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Olympia I and II, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

THE CENTER OF THE WORLD
Explicit, eyeglass-fogging sexual games from the director Wayne Wang. A nerdy, rich Silicon Valley computer engineer, Richard (Peter Sarsgaard), pays a beautiful freckle-faced stripper, Florence (Molly Parker), to accompany him to Las Vegas for a three-day weekend. She agrees but with many conditions (no kissing on the lips, no penetration, strictly limited business hours). Richard is paying, but he wants feeling and emotion; Florence wants nothing but control. The movie, shot with a hand-held digital camera, has a dreamy surface and the aura of a reverie, but there's also a bit of suspense floating in the erotic cloud: Will Richard get Florence to respond to him? A friend of Florence's named Jerri (Carla Gugino), who is her opposite in every way—dark, fleshy, needy—threatens to take the movie to a dangerous place, but she storms off, leaving the two inarticulate principals to mop up.—*D.D.* (4/23 & 30/01) (Angelika Film Center.)

CHLOE IN THE AFTERNOON
Will the squeamish, married hero (Bernard Verley) break down and go to bed with the bohemian Chloe (Zouzou), or won't he? The author-director, Eric Rohmer, a specialist in the eroticism of nonsexual affairs, is a lapidary craftsman who works on a very small scale. This 1972 movie is, in its way, just about perfect, but it's minor, and so polished that it practically evaporates a half hour after it's over. In French.—*Pauline Kael* (BAM Rose Cinemas; May 13.)

THE CIRCLE
Anonymous women on the streets of Teheran crouch alongside cars to avoid police, dart down alleys, and flee from dangerous places with black chadors held over their heads, as if flying under dark wings. At first, we may be puzzled by the frenetic rushing about—the women, seen one or two at a time, don't seem to have any clear goal. But after a while, we realize that this is exactly the point. They have either spent time in prison or are heading straight there, and they are looking for a place to hide in a society in which single women have no more than provisional legitimacy as citizens. The director, Jafar Panahi, offers echoes of the Italian neorealist cinema in the general forlornness and pained humanism of his approach, but he's created aesthetic strategies all his own. Despite a longueur here and there, the cumulative power of "The Circle" is extraordinary. In Farsi.—*D.D.* (4/23 & 30/01) (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

THE DAY I BECAME A WOMAN
In order to elude censorship, the Iranian filmmaker Marzieh Meshkini made three short films (script approval is not required for shorts) and then combined them into a feature. Even with this strategy, she cloaks her intentions in alluring, suggestive imagery. The three sections present allegories for the stages of a woman's life. Most thrilling and desperate is the second, in which a young woman on a bicycle is fleeing from her husband on horseback. It's a film without conclusions, and this seems faithful to its portrait of Iranian women in difficult transition. In Farsi.—*Michael Agger* (Cinema Village.)

DRIVEN
Bring earplugs. Renny Harlin and Sylvester Stallone, the team who gave us the vertical thrills of "Cliffhanger," try to go horizontal with a car-racing movie. It's not a bad popcorn flick as long as Sly and the gang stay in their cars, but when they emerge it gets ugly.—*M.A.* (Battery Park 16, Chelsea West, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, New York Twin, Orpheum VII, Union Square, and Ziegfeld.)

FREDDY GOT FINGERED
The method of freak-out comedian Tom Green, here directing his first movie, is pretty simple: he takes the things that people regard as sacred—pregnant women, defenseless children, the father-son relationship—and savages them like a cable-comedy-show Buñuel. Green gives us burlesque cruelties, put-on sex, ketchupy blood showers, and lots of American cheese in revolting slices. After a while, you know what's coming, and Green's outrages turn out to be shocking not because they're vicious and profane but because they're so badly staged. The film has been described in some quarters as a work of art, but it doesn't have any aesthetic qualities that one could point to: it's madly egotistical, rhythmless, badly lit, terribly edited. Green seems to be daring people to leave, an act of bravado that's not necessarily a sign of talent.—*D.D.* (Battery Park 16, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, Murray Hill Cinemas, and Village East Cinemas.)

THE GOLDEN BOWL
Henry James made easy—no small task, given the complications of the plot. Prince Amerigo (Jeremy Northam) marries Maggie Verver (Kate Beckinsale), whose father, Adam Verver (Nick Nolte), then marries Maggie's friend Charlotte Stant (Uma Thurman). No one, needless to say, has a clue what anyone else is up to, let alone what happened before the marriage craze set in. In the book, such innocence seems like one of the infinite velleities of its atmosphere; onscreen, you have half a mind to slap the characters awake. This is a Merchant-Ivory production, so it looks as luscious as ever, though the actors display an unaccustomed shudder of neurosis; the honorable exception is Nick Nolte, who gives a growling depth to his depiction of the self-made man. Not much happens, although it is cunningly camouflaged as excess; why have a boring party, the film suggests, when you can make it a costume party and have people wear suits of armor? James would have fainted with surprise, although the sight of Uma Thurman in a sheer camisole might have forced him to revise his entire theory of fiction. With Angelica Huston as the voice of disapproval.—*A.L.* (5/7/01) (Paris.)

HI, MOM!
Robert De Niro is at his most spontaneous in this amazing, freewheeling 1970 comedy, written and directed by Brian De Palma. It was made in a cabaret style, taking on one societal target after another. De Niro does quirky parody numbers all the

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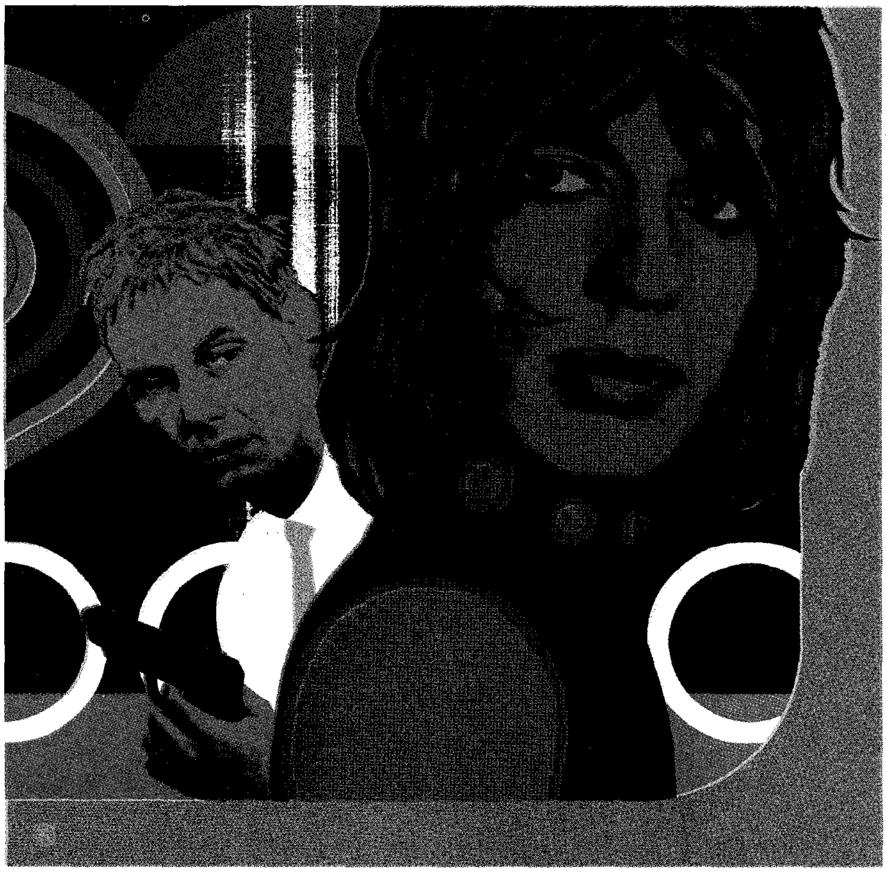
way through; he has long scenes with several of the other performers in which he and his partners set the rhythm as they would on a stage (the camera is motionless), and the results are crazily likable. De Palma uses a lot of camera gags—he keeps you conscious of the film medium by playing Buster Keaton-like games with it.—*P.K.* (American Museum of the Moving Image; May 13.)

IN THE MOOD FOR LOVE
The latest film from the talented young Hong Kong writer-director Wong Kar Wai is all about sensual anticipation. In the early sixties, in a community of Shanghai refugees living in Hong Kong, Mrs. Chan (Maggie Cheung) and Mr. Chow (Tony Leung) are next-door neighbors in a friendly apartment building. The perfectly dressed and coiffed couple meet, talk, and realize that their frequently travelling spouses are off having an affair with each other. What to do? So skillfully does the director bring us to a state of breathless expectation that when he refuses to deliver the goods he almost seems to have invented a new form of perversion. In Cantonese and French.—*D.D.* (2/5/01) (Village East Cinemas.)

JOSIE AND THE PUSSYCATS
A teen movie that's something of a put-on. A milquetoasty record promoter (Alan Cumming) and his bitchy boss (Parker Posey) implant messages in pop songs that tell young America which clothes to buy and stars to like. Into their clutches stumble Josie and the Pussycats, of Archie Comics fame, and, thanks to subliminal suggestion, the band's songs soon top the charts. Throughout all the major-chord fun, the writing and directing team of Harry Elfont and Deborah Kaplan continually winks at the audience. Corporate logos (Starbucks, Target, Revlon) are pasted everywhere; a rebellious record-store employee gets kidnapped by an MTV van; the Manhattan skyline is accessorized with supersized McDonald's arches. These games are fine and frequently hilarious, but what could have been a lark becomes another wearying display of irony.—*M.A.* (Battery Park 16, State, and Union Square.)



At Film Forum, James Fox and Mick Jagger in "Performance."

JOHN RITTER

THE LUZHIN DEFENCE
After the stream-of-consciousness rigors of Virginia Woolf's "Mrs. Dalloway," the director Marleen Gorris tackles the endgames and head games of Vladimir Nabokov's chess novel. John Turturro plays the titular Russian prodigy, and he gives his emotionally catatonic character a slouchy, innocent physical charm. As the countess who loves Luzhin, Emily Watson is all eyes and smiles. Together, the two actors combine for a few clever gambits, but it's mostly a muted affair.—*M.A.* (BAM Rose Cinemas, Beekman, Empire 25, and Union Square.)

MEMENTO
Guy Pearce ("L.A. Confidential") plays Leonard, a former insurance investigator who has mislaid his short-term memory; leave the room and come back ten minutes later, and he won't remember you. To help his case, and to solve the apparent murder of his wife, Leonard tattoos himself with memoranda and drives around the lowlier districts of L.A. County. At the same time, he has a couple of acquaintances (Carrie-Anne Moss and Joe Pantoliano) who seem eager both to support Leonard and to use his condition for their own unscrupulous ends. There is a fine, despairing comedy to these events—not just in our fidgety hero but in the constant thwarting of our need to know. The young British writer and director Christopher Nolan, who has every intention of putting us through the mill, doubles his fun by running the whole story backward. Damn him.—*A.L.* (3/19/01) (Angelika Film Center, Astor Plaza, BAM Rose Cinemas, Battery Park 16, East 86th Street Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, and Olympia I and II.)

ONCE UPON A TIME IN AMERICA
Just about all the incidents in this 1984 three-hour-and-forty-seven-minute film echo scenes in Hollywood gangster movies, but the director, Sergio Leone, inflates them, slows them down, and gives them a dreamy obsessiveness. His widescreen view of a group of Jewish kids who start with petty crime and move into big-time racketeering is set in 1921, 1933, and 1968, but not in that order. His theme is the betrayal of the immigrants' dream of America, and the story begins and ends in an opium den where Noodles (Robert De Niro) puffs on a pipe while episodes of his life of killings and rapes and massacres drift by and a telephone rings somewhere in the past. This epic is a compendium of kitsch, but it's kitsch aestheticized by someone who loves it and sees it as the poetry of the masses. It isn't just the echoing moments that keep you absorbed—it's the reverberant dreamland settings and Leone's majestic, billowing sense of film movement.—*P.K.* (Guggenheim Museum; May 9 and May 12.)

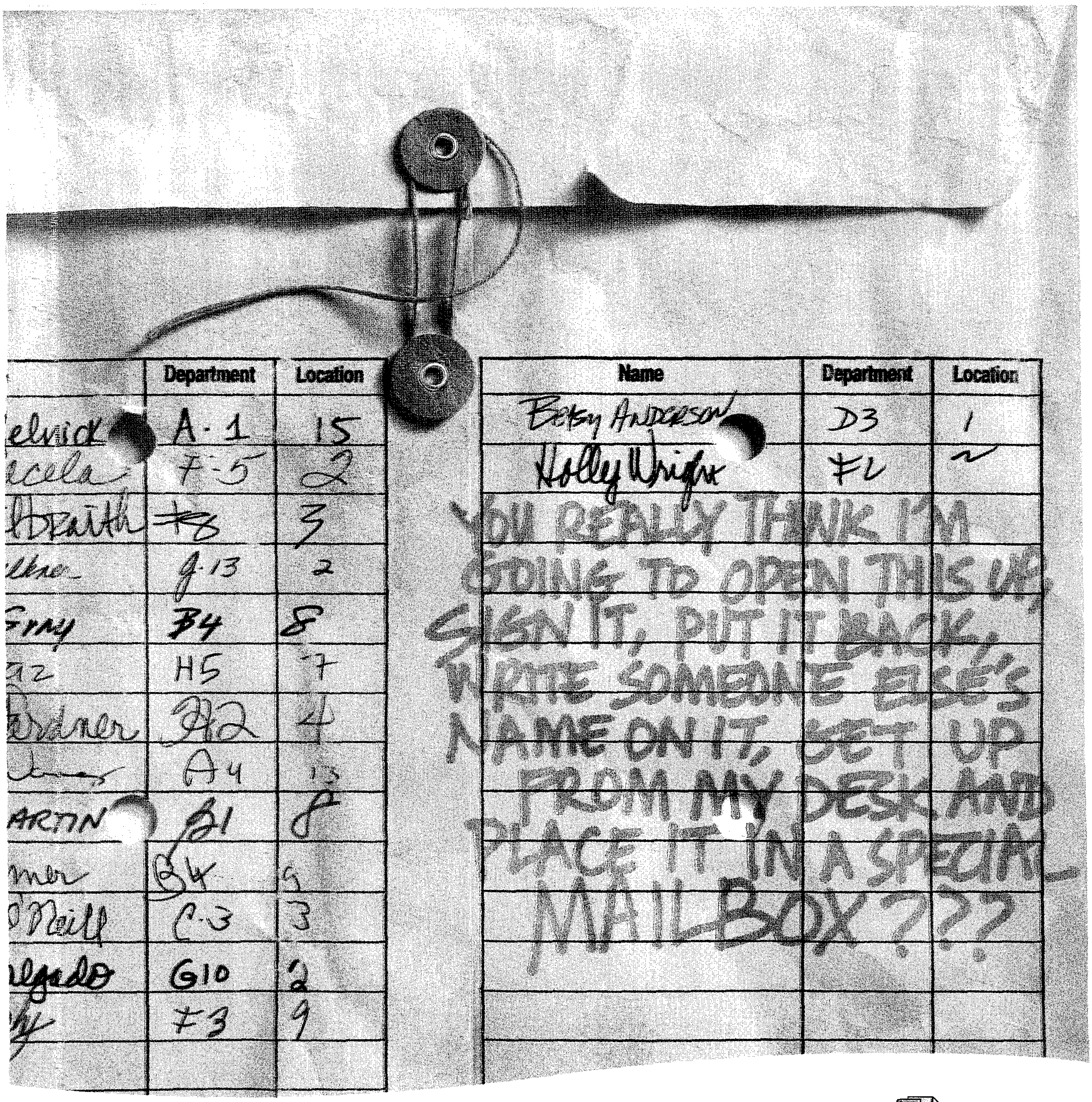
PERFORMANCE
It plays better now as a piece of scabrous swinging-England memorabilia than it did in 1970 as a rock melodrama determined to blow your mind. Co-directed by Nicolas Roeg and the screenwriter Donald Cammell, the film stars James Fox as Chas Devlin, a sadistic East End gangster, and the spiky, ever-androgynous Mick Jagger as a reclusive ex-rocker named Turner. Chas, on the run from his ex-boss, winds up in the basement of Turner's mansion. The house philosophy is "Nothing is true—everything is permitted." The dictum also applies to Roeg and Cammell's hallucinogenic filmmaking. As Chas and Turner drill into each other's heads, drugs blur individuality, and pleasure-seeking blends into nihilism. This film may be a bad trip—but it's a trip.—*Michael Sragow* (Film Forum; May 11-15.)

POLLOCK
A dogged march through the life and work of Jackson Pollock, starting in the early nineteen-forties, when Lee Krasner (Marcia Gay Harden) first approached him in Greenwich Village, continuing through their marriage and other tempests, and ending gloomily in a car wreck in 1956. The film was directed by Ed Harris, who also plays the artist. His face doesn't much resemble that of Pollock, but Harris has mastered the hunched amble and the glaring gaze. His best scenes are not the boozy rants but the quiet times with a cigarette and a brush—or, latterly, a dripping stick. Pollock's drinking was an interruption of his art, not a spur to it, and the film can do little to connect the two; we are left with a sombre study of discontent.—*A.L.* (3/5/01) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, 64th and 2nd, and Village East Cinemas.)

THE TAILOR OF PANAMA
A messy adaptation of the John le Carré novel, directed by John Boorman. As Andy Osnard, Pierce Brosnan plays an anti-Bond: the spy who loves nobody except himself. He is sent to Panama, where he recruits a local tailor, Harry Pendel (Geoffrey Rush)—who, like so many le Carré creations, has constructed the story of himself to escape from a shameful, secret past. On the evidence of Harry's tips, Osnard urges London and Washington to back a democratic coup to the tune of several million dollars. Almost no one in this picture is free of corruption, moral, sexual, or financial; the only virtuous character, Harry's wife, Louisa (Jamie Lee Curtis), is barely allowed room to breathe. Boorman wants to turn the novel's rueful satire into something sharp and sweaty, but the tone veers all over the place, and the plot feels like reckless fantasy.—*A.L.* (4/2/01) (Battery Park 16, Chelsea West, East 85th Street, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, and Union Square.)

TIME AND TIDE
The peaceful title is just a feint. In his thirty-eighth movie, the Hong Kong director Tsui Hark serves up a healthy measure of hard-boiled alienation and gyroscopic firefights. There's also a dizzying plot involving Brazilian mercenaries, the Triad, and pregnant women, but the deft escapes and the how-did-they-do-that shots provide all the gravity the film needs. You can't look away. Pop stars Wu Bai and Nicholas Tse play the lead roles, and contribute to the synth-heavy soundtrack. In Cantonese and Mandarin.—*M.A.* (Village East Cinemas.)

TOWN AND COUNTRY
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Sutton 1 and 2, and Village East Cinemas.)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WITH A FRIEND LIKE HARRY. . .
A smart new horror story, at once thrilling and upsetting, from the director Dominik Moll. Michel (Laurent Lucas), a typically fretful father on vacation with his wife and children, meets an old schoolmate named Harry (Sergi López), who promptly starts changing Michel's life for the better. This entails buying him a new car and then getting to work on his ornery parents, his tired wife, and his frustrated ambitions as a writer. You can't really fault Harry's logic, and that's what makes him so daunting; his analysis of Michel's messy existence would do for just about anyone. It's his homicidal methods that somehow feel *de trop*, although Michel can no more be rid of him than Othello can slip from the clutches of Iago. All this is told with a tight, sweaty concentration. Anyone thinking of getting married and starting a family should probably stay clear of Moll's movie. As for driving around Europe, forget it. With Sophie Guillemin as Harry's inflatable girlfriend. In French.—*A.L.* (5/7/01) (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

ALSO PLAYING

THE CLAIM
Park & 86th Street Cinemas and Union Square.
CROUCHING TIGER, HIDDEN DRAGON (12/11/00)
Battery Park 16, Empire 25, 64th and 2nd, and Village East Cinemas.
EUREKA
State.
THE MUMMY RETURNS
Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Orpheum VII, Union Square, and Waverly.
ONE NIGHT AT MC COOL'S
Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, Coronet Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.
SPY KIDS
Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, and Union Square.
UNDER THE SAND
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema.
THE WIDOW OF SAINT-PIERRE
Cinema Village, Eastside Playhouse, and Empire 25.
YI YI (1/8/01)
Cinema Village.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

Unless noted, call 777-FILM for show times.

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn.
Battery Park 16, West St. at Vesey St. (945-3418).
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinema I, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema II, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3rd Avenue, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363).
Coronet Cinemas, Third Ave. at 59th St.
East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
Empire 25, on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave. (398-3939).
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).

Opening May 11, "Time and Tide," directed by Tsui Hark.

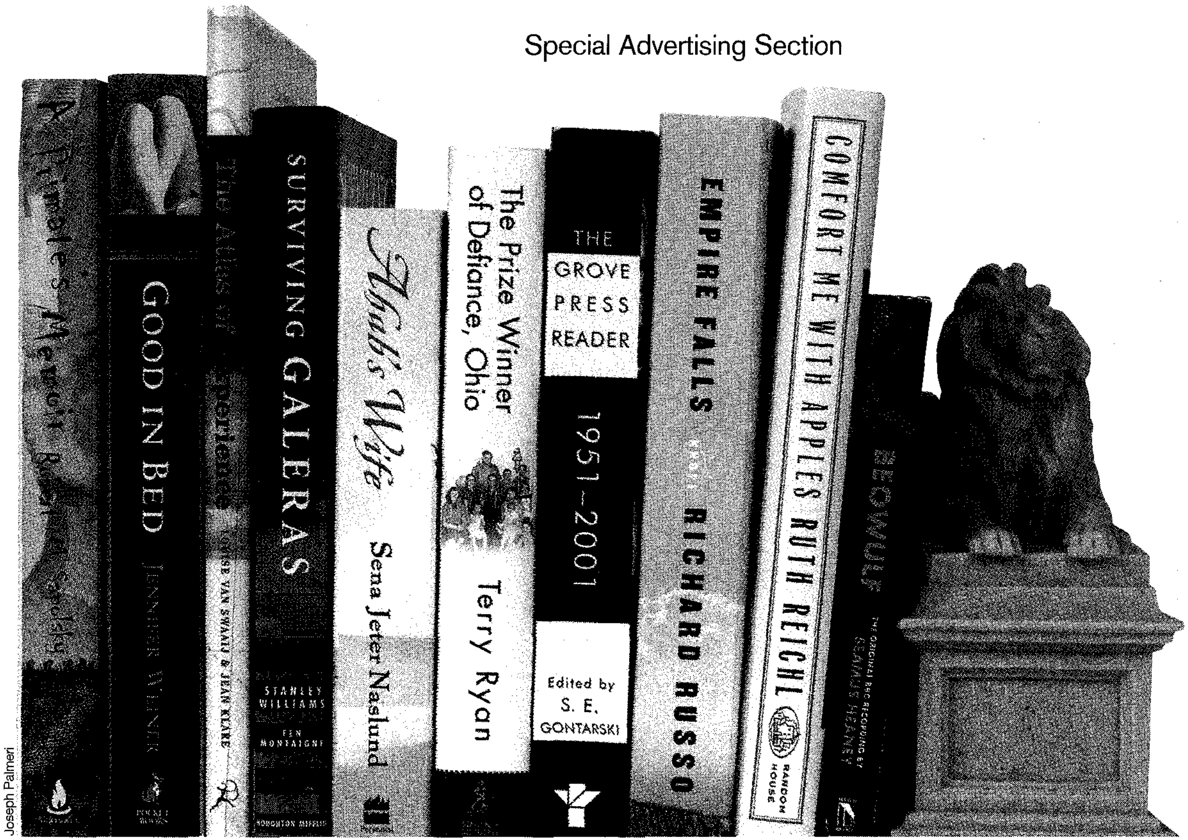
MICHAEL KUPPERMAN

First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St.
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (688-3800).
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Pioneer, 155 E. 3rd St. (254-3300).
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
State, Broadway at 45th St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (875-5600).
Waverly 1 and 2, Sixth Ave. at 3rd St.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—"The Responsive Eye: A Brian De Palma Retrospective." May 12 at 2: "Sisters" (1973). ♦ May 12 at 4: "Raising Cain" (1992). ♦ May 13 at 2: "Carrie" (1976). ♦ May 13 at 4: "Hi, Mom!" (†). ♦ Repertory night. May 12 at 6:30: "The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie" (1972, Luis Buñuel; in French and Spanish).
ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5110)—May 11-13: "Darkness and Light," six films by young filmmakers from Taiwan.
BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (777-3456)—May 9 at 6:50 and 9:30: "Monkey Shines" (1988, George Romero). ♦ May 10 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Suzanne's Career" (1963, Eric Rohmer; in French) and "The Girl at the Monceau Bakery" (1963, Rohmer; in French). ♦ May 11 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "The Aviator's Wife" (1980, Rohmer; in French). ♦ May 13 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Chloe in the Afternoon" (†). ♦ May 14 at 6:50 and 9:10: "Le Soldatesse" (1965, Valerio Zurlini; in French). ♦ May 15 at 6:50 and 9:10: "The Girl with the Suitcase" (1960, Zurlini; in French and Italian).
CINEMA CLASSICS
332 E. 11th St. (971-1015)—May 9-11 at 7:40 and 10 and May 12-13 at 5, 7:30, and 10: "8½" (1963, Federico Fellini; in Italian). ♦ May 14-15 at 8 and 10: "Little Vera" (1988, Vasili Pichul; in Russian).
FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—May 9-10 at 1, 3:45, 7, and 9:35: "Once Upon a Time in China II" (1992, Tsui Hark; in Cantonese). ♦ May 11-15 at 1:10, 3:20, 5:30, 7:40, and 9:50: "Performance" (†).
GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (360-4321)—"Conversations Between Shadows and Light: Italian Cinematography." May 9 at 7 and May 12 at 7: "Once Upon a Time in America" (†). ♦ May 11 at 7 and May 12 at 3: "Mamma Roma" (1962, Pier Paolo Pasolini; in Italian).
MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—Through June 19: "First Run Features: A Retrospective, 1979-2001." May 10 at 2:30: "Cup Final" (1991, Eran Riklis; in Arabic, Hebrew, and English). ♦ May 10 at 6 and May 12 at 2: "Leila" (1997, Dariush Mehrjui; in Farsi). ♦ May 11 at 2:30: "Hamsum" (1996, Jan Troell; in Norwegian, Swedish, and Danish). ♦ May 11 at 6: "The Architecture of Doom" (1991, Peter Cohen; in German). ♦ May 11 at 8:15: "The Sexual Life of Belgians" (1994, Jan Bucquoy; in French). ♦ May 12 at 5: "The Wobblies" (1979, Stewart Bird and Deborah Shaffer). ♦ May 13 at 2 and May 14 at 6: "The Personals" (2000, Chen Kuo-fu). ♦ May 14 at 2:30 and May 15 at 6: "La Désenchantée" (1990, Benoît Jacquot; in French).
MUSEUM OF TELEVISION & RADIO
25 W. 52nd St. (621-6800)—Through May 20: The 2001 Television Documentary Film Festival. May 9 at 7: "Lalee's Kin: The Legacy of Cotton" (2001, Susan Froemke). ♦ May 10 at 7: "True Life: I'm a Candidate" (2001, Banks Tarver). ♦ May 11 at 6:30: "The Target Shoots First" (2001, Christopher Wilcha). ♦ May 12 at 4: "Vladimir Horowitz: The Last Romantic" (1985, Albert and David Maysles). ♦ May 13 at 4: "Soldiers of Music: Rostropovich Returns to Russia" (1991, the Maysles). ♦ May 15 at 6:30: "Half-Past Autumn: The Life and Works of Gordon Parks" (2000, Craig Rice).
SYMPHONY SPACE
2537 Broadway, at 95th St. (864-5400)—"Cinema Italian Style." All films are in Italian. May 15 at 7: "The Bicycle Thief" (1949, Vittorio De Sica). ♦ May 15 at 8:45: "Mamma Roma" (1962, Pier Paolo Pasolini).
WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (875-5600)—Through May 17: "Recent Argentine Cinema."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JENNIFER WEINER
The Atlas of Experience
LOUISE VAN SWAAIJ & JEAN KLARE
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STANLEY WILLIAMS
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Given the constant seasonal stream of new books of every genre, it's no surprise that books are one of the most popular gifts for any occasion. Yet it is precisely the variety of books that makes the process daunting. Few bibliophiles know the landscape of publishing as well as independent booksellers—the passionate and well-read merchants of the imagination.

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The following are some of the booksellers' current selections, along with some great gift recommendations from many of America's most prestigious publishers. Whether expressing a tribute to someone dear or commemorating a special occasion, you'll find plenty of inspired choices. And thanks to BookSense's Web

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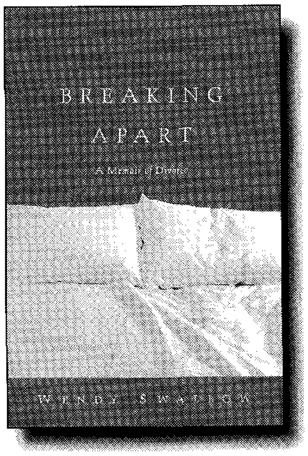

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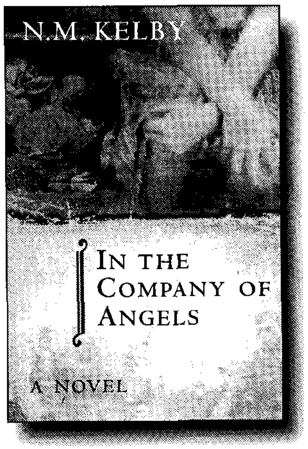

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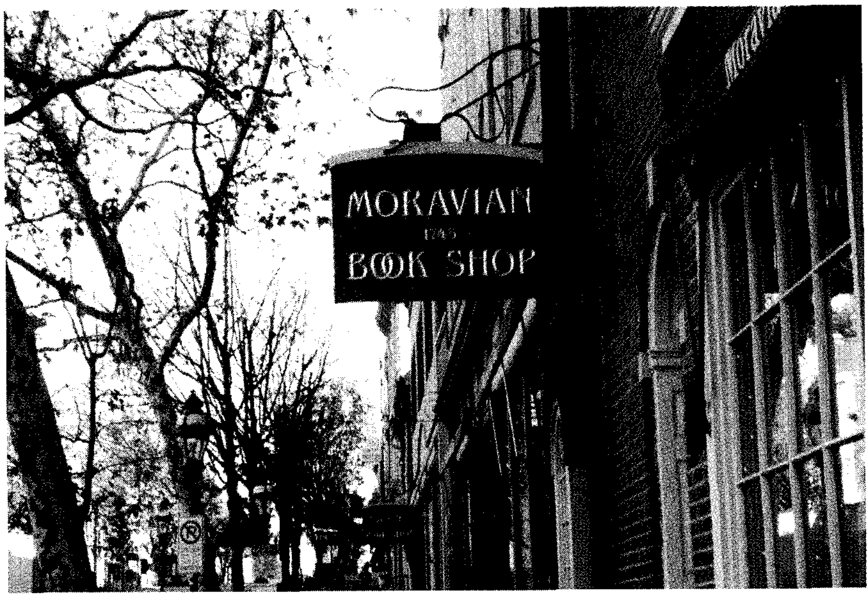

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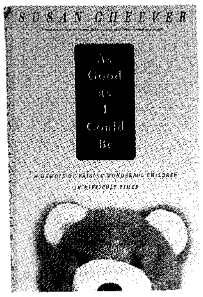
PUBLISHER'S PICK



Benefitting from the hindsight of eighteen years on the job, Susan Cheever reveals the challenges, joys, and heartbreaks of parenting in "As Good As I Could Be: A Memoir of Raising Wonderful Children in Difficult Times" (Simon & Schuster). Provocative, perceptive, and unflinchingly honest, this book is a touchstone for parents everywhere who are doing the best they can.

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MOTHERS OF INVENTION

For Mother's Day 2001, possible gift selections range from novel uses of the English language to evocative memoirs to a sumptuous exploration of food prose. New novels are guaranteed to captivate. Lalita Tademy's exploration of her own family history resulted in "Cane River" (Warner Books), the story of three generations of African-American women in rural Louisiana ranging from the early nineteenth through the mid-twentieth centuries. Linda M. Vinstra of the Great Northern Bookstore in Oscoda, MI (www.greatnorthernbooks.com) says this historical novel is "a cross between 'Roots' and 'Gone with the Wind.'"

Rachel Seiffert's first novel, "The Dark Room" (Pantheon Books), invokes three distinctly different voices to convey life in Germany from 1920 to the present. Bill Cusumano of Nicola's Books in Ann Arbor, MI (www.nicolas books.com) calls it "an auspicious and audacious debut work."

PUBLISHER'S PICK

"Fish, Blood and Bone" by Leslie Forbes (Farrar, Straus & Giroux) chronicles what happens when a young American woman inherits a London home from a relative only to discover some peculiar family secrets. *Kirkus Reviews* describes it as "equal parts Gothic romance, sci-fi thriller, adventure narrative, and feminist bildungsroman. It gives new meaning to the term 'intelligent page turner.'"

Romantics will be enchanted with "The Feast of Love" by Charles Baxter (Vintage Books), a tale of star-crossed paramours. Adrian Newell of Warwick's in La Jolla, CA (www.warwicks.com) predicts that anyone will "be drawn into this 'Midsummer Night's Dream'-like

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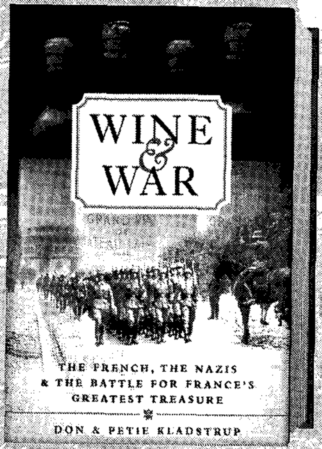
SUSAN HERRMANN LOOMIS turns a lifelong love affair with Normandy into a new life.



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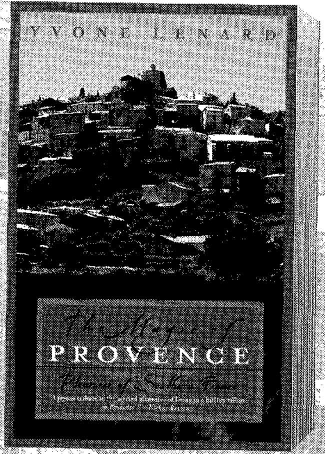
Don & Petie Kladstrup

DON and PETIE KLADSTRUP bring to light the remarkable story of how the French kept their precious wines from the Nazis.



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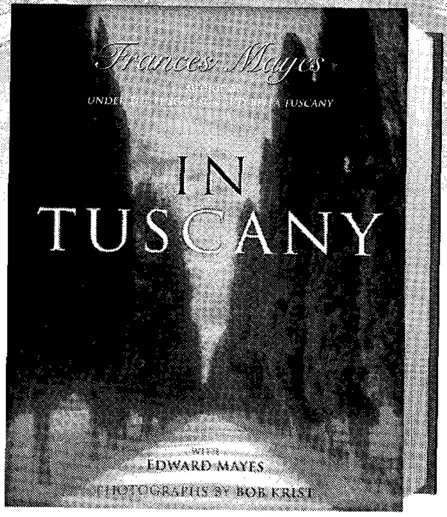
YVONE LENARD rediscovers the sumptuous treasures of her homeland.

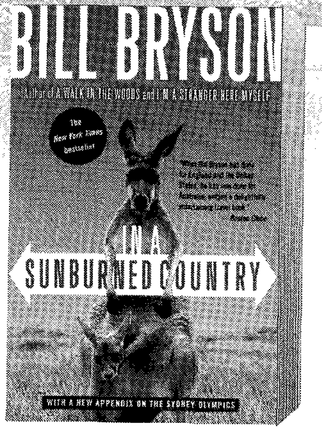
A Favorite Place in the Sun



Frances Mayes
In Tuscany
with Edward Mayes
Photographs by Bob Krist

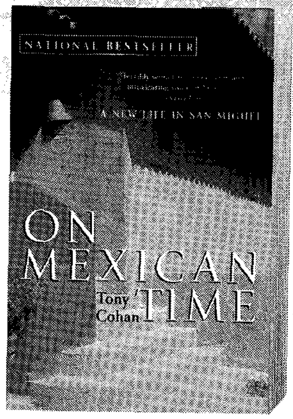
FRANCES MAYES, our literary ambassador to Tuscany, brings the sweet life to you with lyrical prose and glorious full-color photographs.

Portable Paperback Companions



Bill Bryson
In a Sunburned Country
With a new appendix on the Sydney Olympics

Now it's easier than ever to put **BILL BRYSON'S** rollicking tour of the outback in your backpack.



National Bestseller
A New Life in San Miguel
On Mexican Time
Tony Cohan

TONY COHAN checks out of the rat race—and into a simpler, more rewarding life in San Miguel de Allende.

MOVING EXPERIENCES

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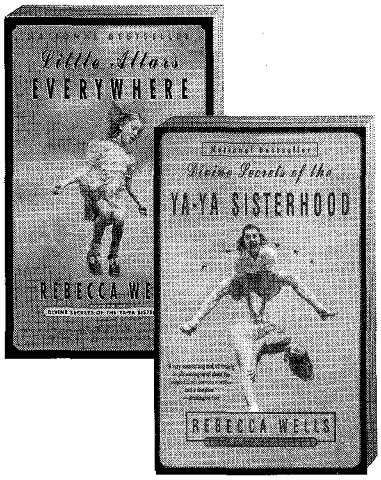

This Mother's Day, Share a Divine Secret

give

Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood

REBECCA WELLS

The Modern Classics about mothers, daughters, and the healing power of female friendship.

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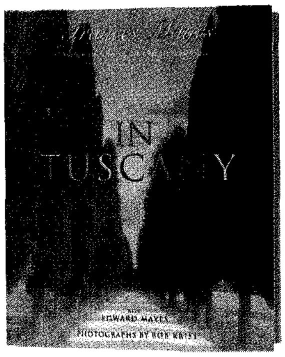
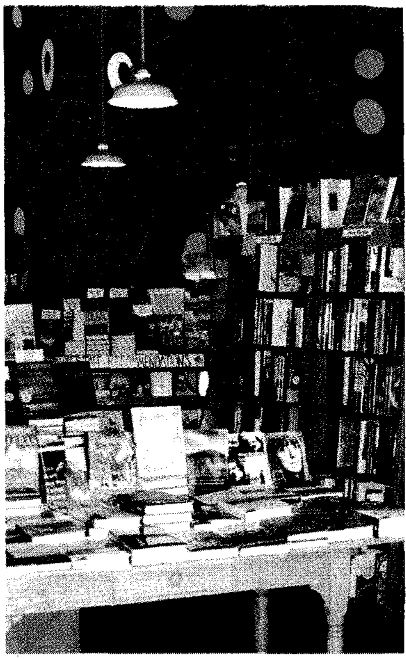
novel set in current day Ann Arbor." And though she merits only the briefest mention in "Moby-Dick," the spouse of Captain Ahab has her own incredible story to tell. Audrey Beach Scheutze of Hawley-Cooke Booksellers in Louisville, KY (http://hawleycooke.booksense.com) calls Sena Jeter Naslund's "Ahab's Wife or, The Star-Gazer" (Perennial) "the perfect consummation of Ahab's incomplete world."

For something a bit more saucy and raucous, Jennifer Weiner's "Good in Bed" (Pocket Books) boasts "a vibrant heroine who will win your heart with her verve," according to Amanda Tobier of Third Place Books in Lake Forest Park, WA (www.thirdplacebooks.com). "Funny, engaging, and so very wonderful," is the

PUBLISHER'S PICK



When it comes to experiencing the magic of the Italian countryside, Frances Mayes's "In Tuscany" (Broadway Books) may prove just as evocative as an afternoon stroll through an olive grove. A sumptuous celebration of the abundant pleasures of Italian life—at home, at festivals, restaurants and markets, in the kitchen, and the vineyards—the book features breathtaking photography that captures the light and color of this beloved part of the world.



This page: Esmeralda Books and Coffee in Del Mar, CA

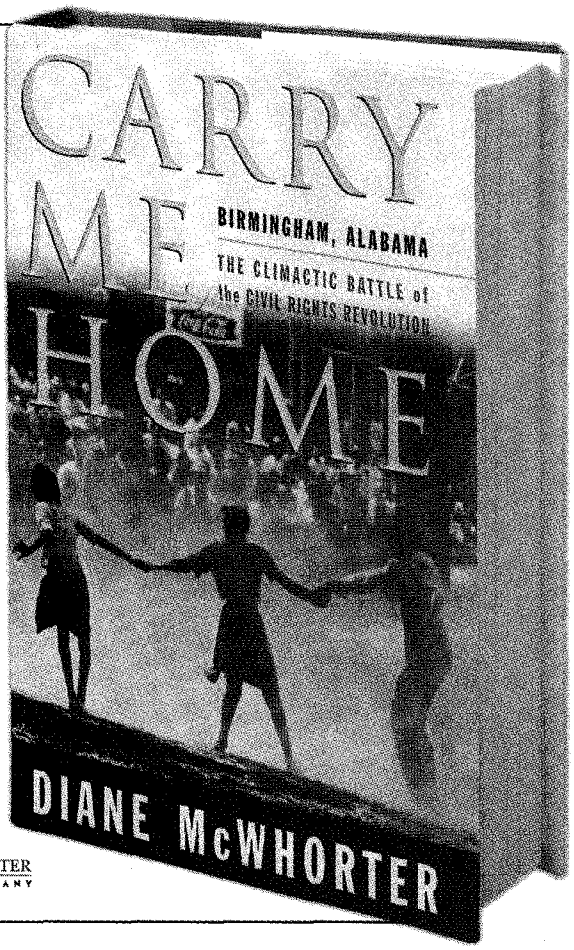
"A big, important book... the most significant domestic drama of the 20th century."
—*Newsweek*

"Impressive....McWhorter's comprehensive reporting allows for no sacred cows."
—*The New York Times Book Review*

"Not only history, but autobiography...."
—*Time*

"A powerful moral epic....First-rate history."
—*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

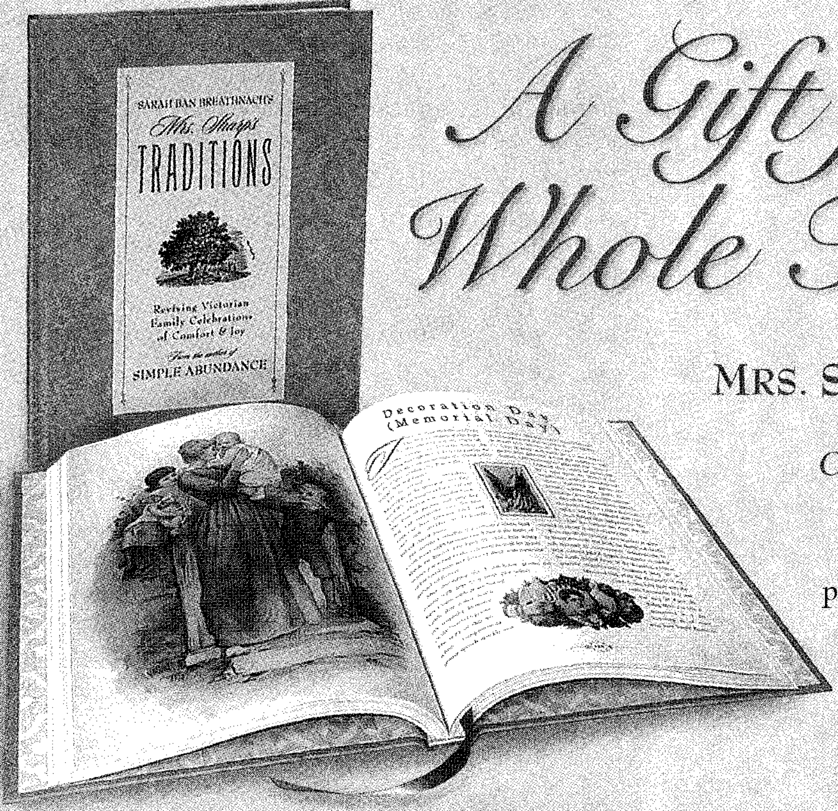
"Powerfully written, vividly recounted...magisterial."
—*Los Angeles Times Book Review*


CARRY ME HOME
BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA
THE CLIMACTIC BATTLE of the CIVIL RIGHTS REVOLUTION
DIANE McWHORTER

SIMON & SCHUSTER
A VIACOM COMPANY

FROM SARAH BAN BREATHNACH, BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *SIMPLE ABUNDANCE*

A Gift for the Whole Family.


SARAH BAN BREATHNACH'S
Mrs. Sharp's
TRADITIONS
Reviving Victorian Family Celebrations of Comfort & Joy
From the author of
SIMPLE ABUNDANCE
Decoration Day
(Memorial Day)

MRS. SHARP'S TRADITIONS
Reviving Victorian Family Celebrations of Comfort & Joy

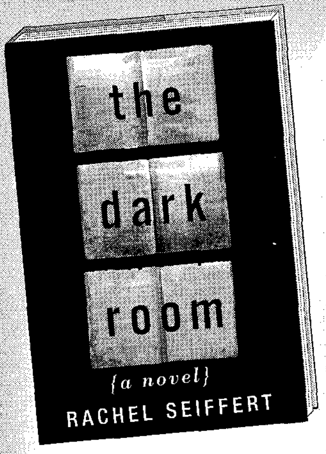
Rediscover the old-fashioned pleasures of family and home.

Color photographs throughout, ribbon marker, printed endpapers.

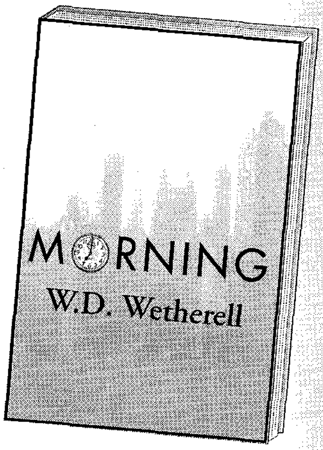
THE SIMPLE ABUNDANCE PRESS
SCRIBNER

www.simonsays.com

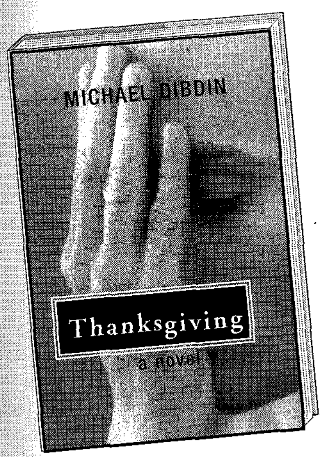
New From Pantheon



Rachel Seiffert
"Brilliant.... Absorbing."
—Charles Baxter, author of *The Feast of Love*



W.D. Wetherell
"Stunningly original."
—Bret Lott, author of *Jewel*



Michael Dibdin
"Poignant.... Gripping."
—*Entertainment Weekly*
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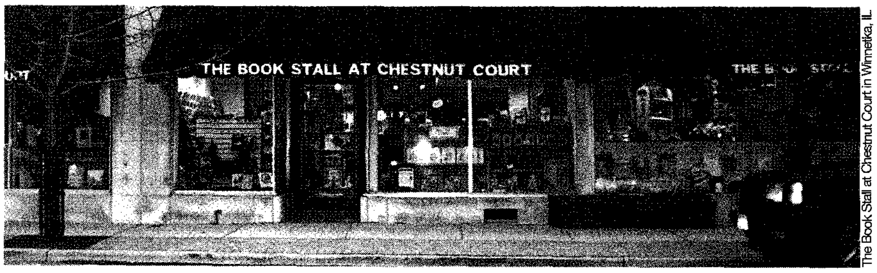
www.pantheonbooks.com Wherever Books Are Sold



The Book Stall at Chestnut Court in Winnetka, IL

way Tobier describes the story of a plus-sized pop culture reporter who discovers that her ex-boyfriend has been chronicling their former sex life in a national magazine.

Mother's Day is as much an occasion of reflection as it is of celebration. Terry Ryan's "The Prize Winner of Defiance, Ohio: How My Mother Raised 10 Kids on 25 Words or Less" (Simon & Schuster) shares the heartwarming story of how a mother kept her family afloat by entering contests and writing ad jingles for everything from Dial soap to Beech-Nut gum. The story earns raves from Cathy Keibler of Louisville's Hawley-Cooke Booksellers: "This book is a wonderful reminder that life really is what you make of it and that you can surmount what looks like overpowering circumstances."

Equally inspiring is Don J. Snyder's "Of Time and Memory: My Parents' Love Story" (Ballantine Books). Fifty years later, Snyder commemorates his parents' brief marriage and his mother's untimely death at the age of nineteen (just two weeks after giving birth to the author). Leslie Graham of San Francisco's A Clean Well-Lighted Place for Books (www.bookstore.com) cites this "poignant and beautiful story" as one of the best books of the year.

On the food front, Nancy Quinn of Harry W. Schwartz Bookshops in Milwaukee (www.schwartzbooks.com) has long savored the idea of a sequel to Ruth Reichl's best-selling "Tender at the Bone." Now that she's tasted "Comfort Me with Apples: More Adventures at the Table" (Random House), Quinn "can't wait to share it with all the satisfied readers of the first volume of Reichl's delicious memoirs. Last time she explored her love of food; this time, it's how she came to love food writing."

POP CULTURE

Rather than giving dad a collection of rarefied wisdom on improving his golf stroke, present him with a stroke of genius or two. The book options this year for Father's Day are better than par for the course.

Books can foster an exhilarating spirit of adventure, taking the reader to heights that are inaccessible otherwise. "Touching My Father's Soul: A Sherpa's Journey to the Top of Everest" by Jamling Tenzing Norgay with Broughton Coburn (HarperSanFrancisco) piqued the interest of Robby Bick of Bunch of Grapes in Vineyard Haven, MA (www.bunchofgrapes.com). "The son of the first Sherpa to reach Everest's summit has written a deeply affecting book, which expands the boundaries of the mountain adventure genre. It's as much a journey

PUBLISHER'S PICK

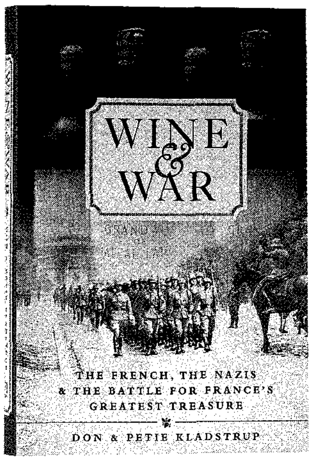
Thanks to new biography, history, and creative nonfiction, your father can journey back in time. Alison Weir's "Henry VIII: The King and His Court" (Ballantine Books) offers the first detailed, personal biography of the charismatic monarch set against the cultural, social, and political tenor of the times.

into self and family as it is an account of a successful ascent of Everest during the disastrous 1996 season."

Themes of survival and discovery resonate in "Surviving Galeras" by Stanley Williams and Fen Montaigne (Houghton Mifflin), a chronicle of what happened to a team of scientists working atop a volcano when it suddenly erupted in 1993. Lois Powers of The Toadstool Bookshop in Milford, NH (www.toadbooks.com) describes it as "a riveting personal story of survival and sacrifice, as well as an enlightening look into the science of volcanoes."

Offering a welcome respite from mundane routines, two other books explore humankind's relationship with the wild. As a young zoologist, Robert M. Sapolsky, author of "A Primate's Memoir" (Scribner), left the creature comforts of America for two decades in order to consort with baboons in Africa. "In humorous and illuminating prose," notes Barbara Hoagland of The King's English Bookshop in Salt Lake City (http://kingsenglish.booksense.com),

PUBLISHER'S PICK


WINE & WAR
THE FRENCH, THE NAZIS & THE BATTLE FOR FRANCE'S GREATEST TREASURE
DON & PETIE KLADSTRUP

While the fate of European fine art during World War II has been previously explored, "Wine & War: The French, the Nazis, and the Battle for France's Greatest Treasure" by Don and Petie Kladstrup (Broadway Books) reveals for the first time exactly what transpired in wartime France's fabled wine cellars. From the story of the owners of Paris's famed restaurant, La Tour d'Argent, who built a wall to conceal their most precious twenty thousand bottles, to the tale of French soldiers who triumphantly reclaimed Hitler's cache of stolen wine, "Wine & War" illuminates a compelling, little-known chapter of history.

What's new from Knopf?

Peter Mayle's FRENCH LESSONS
Armed with Knife, Fork, and Corkscrew, the *toujours* entertaining celebrator of Provence now guides you through every gastronomically glorious corner of France. A delicious book that makes you savvy, happy, & hungry.*

A new ADAM DALGLIESH mystery by P.D. James
DEATH IN HOLY ORDERS
All the suspense, depth, and narrative excitement we have come to expect from today's undisputed master of the classic mystery novel. Take it with you on vacation.*

Wendy Wasserstein
SHIKSA GODDESS OR, HOW I SPENT MY FORTIES
The Pulitzer Prize-playwright's first book of essays in 10 years is funny and moving, sassy and serious, and takes on universal midlife realities and dreams—from eternal slenderness to perfect motherhood (and daughterhood).

DAZZLER: THE LIFE & TIMES OF MOSS HART
Steven Bach's biography of the nonpareil playwright who gave us *Lady in the Dark* and, with George S. Kaufman, *You Can't Take it With You* and *The Man Who Came to Dinner.*
"Ironic, knowing, tartly sympathetic, and written with rare wit, pace, and grace" —Richard Schickel

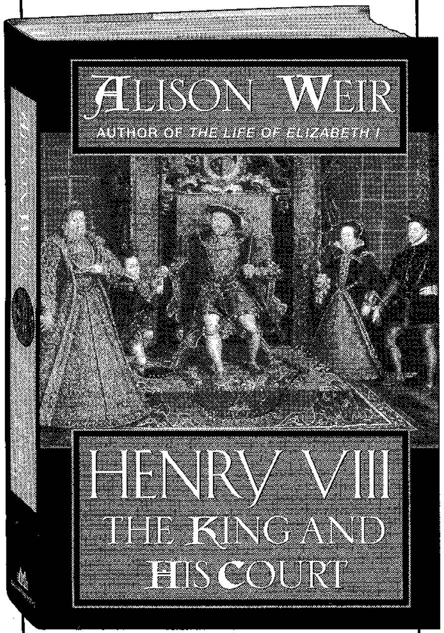
Anne Tyler's 15th novel
BACK WHEN WE WERE GROWNUPS
It begins: "Once upon a time, there was a woman who discovered she had turned into the wrong person." It carries us deep into that wry, surprising Anne Tyler world from which we always return refreshed and enchanted.*

*Also available as a Random House AudioBook
www.aaknopf.com

HUSBAND
of six legendary women.

FATHER
of four British monarchs.

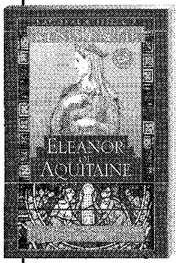
KING
of England's most
renowned court.


ALISON WEIR
AUTHOR OF THE LIFE OF ELIZABETH I
HENRY VIII
THE KING AND
HIS COURT

Now, history's most celebrated and notorious ruler at last takes center stage.

"Alison Weir has perfected the art of bringing history to life."
—*Chicago Tribune*

New in paperback


ELEANOR OF
AQUITAINE

Eleanor of Aquitaine

"An alluringly candid portrait of this most public yet elusive of women."
—*The Boston Globe*

A Ballantine Hardcover
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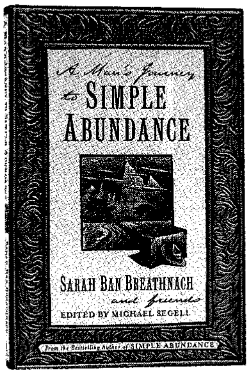
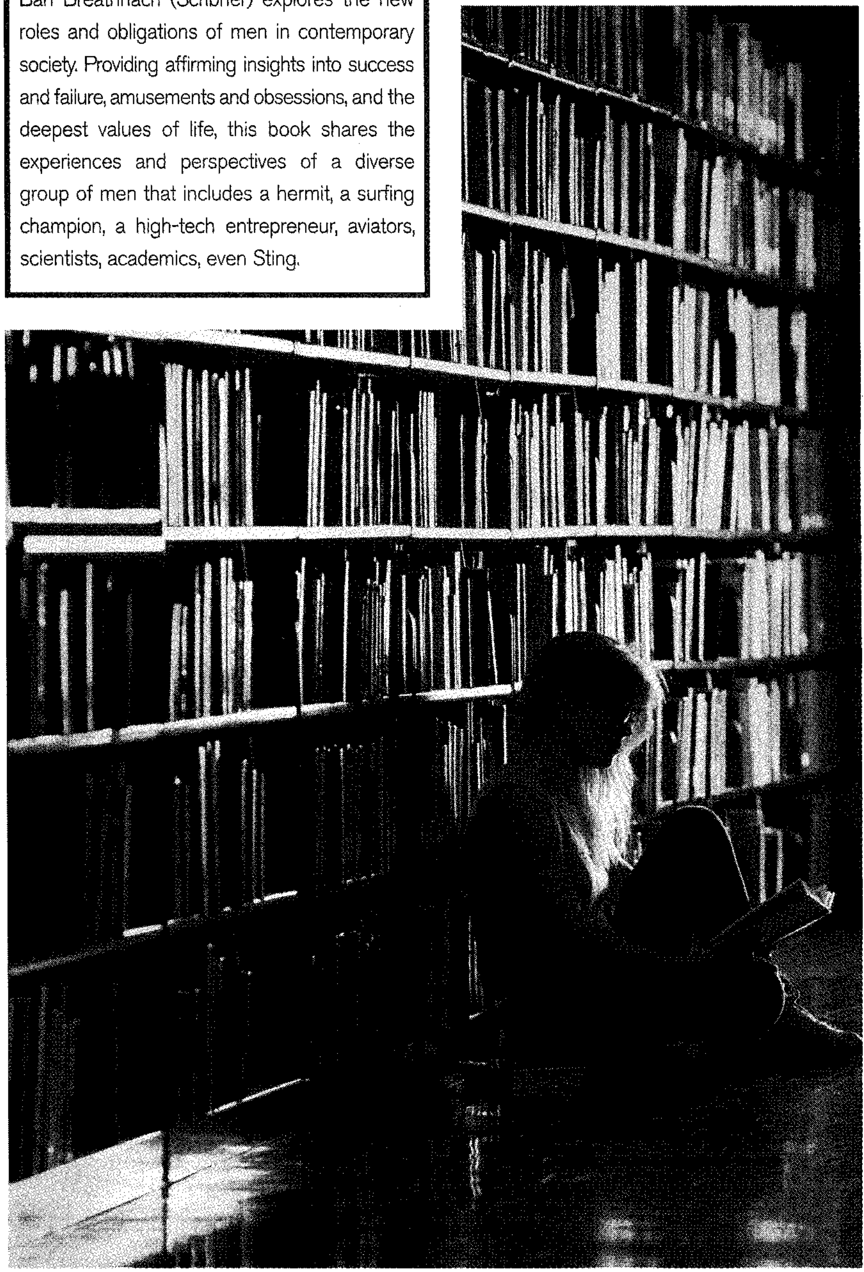
PUBLISHER'S PICK


A Man's Journey
to SIMPLE
ABUNDANCE
SARAH BAN BREATHNACH
and friends
EDITED BY MICHAEL SEGELL
From the Bestselling Author of SIMPLE ABUNDANCE

To give the gift of refreshing perspective, "A Man's Journey to Simple Abundance" by Sarah Ban Breathnach (Scribner) explores the new roles and obligations of men in contemporary society. Providing affirming insights into success and failure, amusements and obsessions, and the deepest values of life, this book shares the experiences and perspectives of a diverse group of men that includes a hermit, a surfing champion, a high-tech entrepreneur, aviators, scientists, academics, even Sting.

Sapolsky "details the oddities and charm of the country." Hoagland says, "He is an articulate and passionate voice for the baboons, as well as for Africa as a whole." Scott Carrier pens an intriguing memoir of the wild in "Running After Antelope" (Counterpoint). Describing Carrier's voice as an irresistible blend of David Sedaris and Sam Shepard, Christopher Hubbuch of Ruminator Books in St. Paul, MN (http://ruminator.booksense.com) appreciates the author's "ongoing quixotic attempts to catch a pronghorn antelope on foot."

Money has been said to talk, but it appears that money also travels. In "Money Makes the World Go Around:



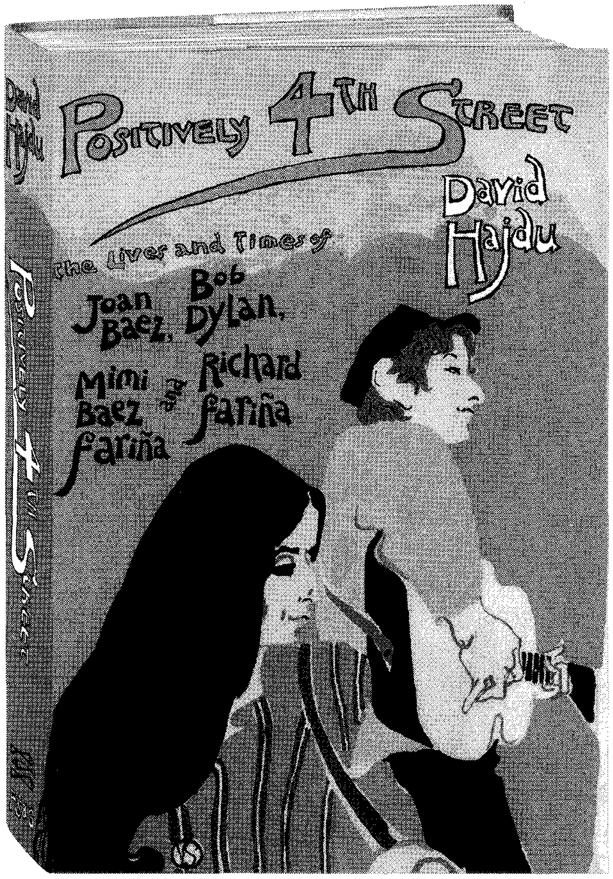
© Terry Vine/Stone

One Investor Tracks Her Cash Through the Global Economy, from Brooklyn to Bangkok and Back" (Viking), Barbara Garson gives readers the rare opportunity to follow the money trail around the world and watch its impact on a variety of people. Michael Rosenthal of San Francisco's Modern Times Bookstore (www.mtbs.com) writes, "Suffused with a quirky sense of humor and deep empathy for the people she encounters, from bankers on Wall Street to papaya vendors in Bangkok, this is totally original and flat-out brilliant."

Another alternative for Father's Day 2001 is Richard Russo's diverting new novel, "Empire Falls" (Knopf). It tells the story of a town in slow decline as witnessed in exacting detail by the owner of the local diner. Jean Westcott of Olsson's Books & Records in Arlington, VA (www.olssons.com) says, "As events unfold, Russo's depiction of this small town and those who are shaped by its decline are so lifelike, you will find yourself revisiting the characters long after you finish the book."

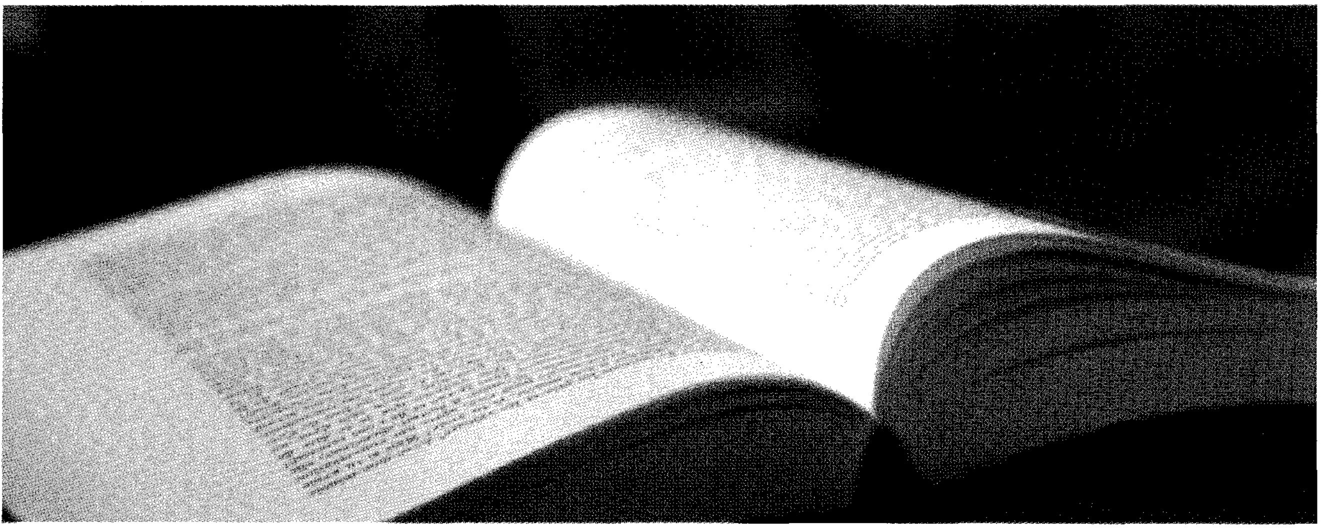
For National Pubic Radio junkies, there's nothing quite like rediscovering a favorite broadcast. That's precisely the experience they'll have with the CD, "Lost & Found Sound: Radio Stories from NPR's All Things Considered, Volume One" (HighBridge Audio). Warning that it "will knock you out," Marian Fleischman of Sedalia Book & Toy in Sedalia, MO notes that "fans will be thrilled to have the segments they missed, and even more excited to own a copy so they can hear Tennessee Williams' riff on penny arcades whenever they wish."

Four young bohemians on the make—
BOB DYLAN, JOAN BAEZ, MIMI BAEZ, AND RICHARD FARIÑA—
converged in Greenwich Village, fell in love, and invented a sound and style that is one of the most lasting legacies of the 1960s.



"A great defining drama of the '60s."
—Luc Sante

FARRAR STRAUS GIROUX



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DISCOVER THE MAGIC OF

DAVID ALMOND

The new novel from the *New York Times* bestselling author of *Skellig* and winner of the Michael L. Printz Award for *Kit's Wilderness*

HEAVEN EYES
DAVID ALMOND
Author of Skellig and Kit's Wilderness

“The beauty . . . is that David Almond does not need to explain, to tie up all loose ends, to teach one particular lesson. . . . Think C. S. Lewis, Lynne Reid Banks, even E. Nesbit.”
—*The New York Times Book Review*

“[David Almond's] tantalizing settings and poetic narrative have a lingering effect, much like a prophetic dream.”
—*Publishers Weekly*

A BOOK SENSE 76 PICK

Kit's Wilderness
“An exceptional book for young adults that is not to be missed.”
—Judy Hobbs,
Third Place Books,
Lake Forest Park, WA

KIT'S WILDERNESS

Delacorte Press

Available wherever books are sold.
www.randomhouse.com/teens

LISTENING LIBRARY

CELEBRATION CUM LAUDE

Graduation means arriving at one of life's great forks in the road, and graduation gifts run the gamut from books that mark the occasion to resources that can help direct new graduates on the road to successful careers.

BOOKSTORE OPEN

Bell Book and Candle Bookshop in Port Orchard, WA

Assistance, albeit of the metaphorical kind, comes in “The Atlas of Experience” by Louise van Swaaij and Jean Klare (Bloomsbury). An inspired guide to the adventurous journey of life, this atlas invites the traveller to explore hitherto uncharted realms of imagination, ideas, feelings, and experience. Paul Hanson of Eagle Harbor Book Co. in Bainbridge Island, WA (www.eagleharborbooks.com) raves: “What an original concept! Beautiful at first glance, amazing upon examination. This is a book to savor, to explore, to immerse yourself in.”

PUBLISHER'S PICK

On the practical side, translating a newly minted diploma into a promising career is a cagey assignment unlike any encountered in the halls of academia. Jeffrey J. Fox's “Don't Send a Resume And Other Contrarian Rules to Help Land a Great Job” (Hyperion Books) is a no-nonsense collection of surprising and sometimes daring rules for the neophyte.

To expand a new grad's literary acumen, consider “The Grove Press Reader: 1951-2001,” edited by S. E. Gontarski (Grove Press). Tim Mooney of Reading on Walden Bookstore in Chicago (www.readingonwalden.com) says, “Quite simply, this is the rise, fall, and reincarnation of one of the most influential presses of the last half of the twentieth century. There's Beckett, Kerouac, Lawrence, Miller, Paz, Burroughs, and many others.”

For sheer literary pyrotechnics, one would be hard-pressed to top two new audio offerings. What better way to cap an academic career than by hearing an internationally lauded poet read some of his favorite verse? James Harris of Prairie Lights in Iowa City (www.prairielights books.com) has this to say about "Beowulf" (HighBridge Audio), translated and read by Nobel Prize-winning poet Seamus Heaney: "This is to literature what the Lascaux paintings are to art." John Mahon of Goering's Book Center in Gainesville, FL (www.goerings.com) cites a similar experience with T. S. Eliot reading some of his greatest works, including "The Waste Land" and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." Mahon calls "T. S. Eliot Reads" (Harper Audio/Caedmon) "priceless."

PUBLISHER'S PICK

Two new picture books introduce a couple of enchanting animal creatures sharing hilarious misadventures. "Lisa's Airplane Trip" and "Gaspard on Vacation," written by Anne Gutman and illustrated by Georg Hallensleben (Knopf), are already an enormous hit in France and have earned raves on this side of the pond as well. According to *Booklist*, each is a "delight [that] celebrates the brave young voyager who discovers a huge world."

AFTER-SCHOOL SPECIALS

When it comes to inspiring the imaginations of children, anytime is the perfect time to make the gift of a book. Independent booksellers have plenty of recommendations for both children and young adults. In fact, the "Children's Book Sense 76 Recommendation List" will be available by June. You can get a free copy at your local independent bookseller affiliated with Book Sense or visit www.BookSense.com.

Multimedia packaging adds something magical to "The Jazz Fly" written by Matthew Gollub and illustrated by Karen Hanke (Tortuga Press, Ages 4-8). Linda Stivala of Gansevoort House Books in Little Falls, NY (www.gansevoorthousebooks.com) describes this book and CD as "the best new 'children of all ages' book! The story touts jazz as creative thinking and the freedom to experiment with sound. This comes naturally to children and now 'The Jazz Fly' introduces the concept to all of us!"

Danielle Morgan of Village Books in Bellingham, WA (http://villagebooks.booksense.com) is in love with "Angus, Thongs, and Full-Frontal Snogging: Confessions of Georgia Nicolson" by Louise Rennison (HarperCollins). Morgan writes, "What if Judy Blume and Helen Fielding morphed and wrote a book? This is a hilarious and brazenly honest account of the very complicated world that is the life of an eleven-year-old London girl."

THE GIFT OF CHOICE

Can't decide what book would make the best gift? Book Sense offers a national gift certificate redeemable in all fifty states as well as Puerto Rico and the United States Virgin Islands. The gift certificate is available in more than 1,200 independent bookstores or through www.BookSense.com.

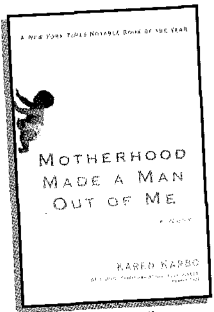
PUBLISHER'S PICK

For the junior gumshoe in the house, "Sammy Keyes and the Hollywood Mummy" by Wendelin Van Draanen (Knopf) is the latest installment in the popular mystery series. Admittedly, Sammy is no Nancy Drew. Ace mystery scribe Sue Grafton describes Sammy as "feisty, fearless, and funny" and *The Horn Book* calls the series "high quality, high amp." In her latest adventure, super-sleuth Sammy uncovers dark secrets hidden beneath the glamour of Tinsel Town.

For more information on the eclectic choices of the bimonthly "Book Sense 76 Recommendation List" or to find the nearest independent bookstore, call 1-888-BookSense toll free.

Love, sex, marriage, kids... (in any order)

Motherhood
~~Marriage~~ is forever...


A New York Times Notable Book of the Year
MOTHERHOOD MADE A MAN OUT OF ME
KAREN KARBO

A *New York Times* Notable Book of the Year

'Give *Motherhood* to your mom, your sister, your best friend, yourself, then spend all day savoring Karbo's delicious, wicked wit.' –*Colorado Springs Independent*

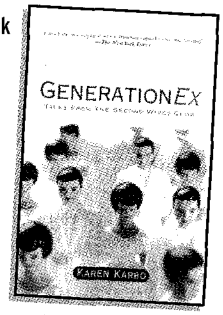
'Hilarious...should be clutched to the breasts of every new mother.' –*The New York Times Book Review*

'Brilliant! Karbo delivers a swift kick in the kegels to those sappy *What to Expect When You're Expecting* moms in her funny and appallingly honest novel.' –*Vanity Fair*

Karen Karbo

Divarriage
~~Divorce~~ is for life...

'Imagine Erma Bombeck and Nora Ephron hammered on Jack Daniels, dishing ex-husbands and their trophy trollops, and you've got *Generation Ex.*' –*Vanity Fair*



'Providing solace and advice for anyone trying to make sense of a family tree gone haywire with divorce and remarriage, the latest by Karbo is like a fresh breeze setting everything right. Hilarious.' –*Publishers Weekly*

'A wise, witty book... a smart and ruefully funny examination of divorced life.' –*The New York Times Book Review*

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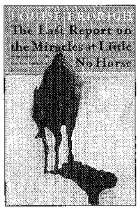
Book Sense 76

INDEPENDENT BOOKSELLER RECOMMENDATIONS

The Top Ten recommendations from the May/June Book Sense 76, as voted by independent booksellers.



1. THE LAST REPORT ON THE MIRACLES AT LITTLE NO HORSE

by Louise Erdrich (HarperCollins, $26) "This is the best book I've read this year. Erdrich has gone beyond 'just' beautiful writing and social consciousness. The story is compelling and wondrous. I portioned out the pages, as I never wanted it to end."—KATHY WESTOVER, THE BOOKWORM OF EDWARDS, EDWARDS, CO Also on HarperAudio.

2. IN MY HANDS:

Memories of a Holocaust Rescuer

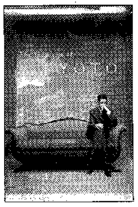
by Irene Gut Opdyke (Anchor, $12 paper) "What an incredible story! This memoir proves that acts of love and courage can stand out among the worst acts of war and hatred, and that one person, even someone who is 'only a girl,' can make an incredible difference in the world." —BETH DEAN, THE OPEN BOOK, CINCINNATI, OH Also a Listening Library Audio.

The Prize Winner of Defiance, Ohio
How My Mother Raised 10 Kids on 25 Words or Less
Terry Ryan

3. THE PRIZE WINNER OF DEFIANCE, OHIO:

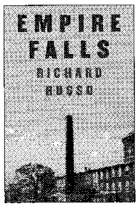
How My Mother Raised 10 Kids on 25 Words or Less

by Terry Ryan (Simon & Schuster, $24) "I Love this book! It's funny, moving, compulsively readable…and a wonderful reminder that anyone can surmount what looks like overwhelming circumstances. Terry Ryan's mother, Evelyn, is an inspiration to us all."—CATHY KEIBLER, HAWLEY-COOKE BOOKSELLERS, LOUISVILLE, KY Also on S&S Audio.



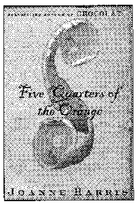
4. THE GARDENS OF KYOTO

by Kate Walbert (Scribner, $24) "As Ellen recounts the real and imagined details of her first love as a young girl, we are reminded of how it can affect our lives for years to come. This is a haunting, beautiful novel, and I finished it wishing that the characters were real." —REBECCA JESTICE, DICKEN'S BOOK SHOP, LEBANON, OH



5. EMPIRE FALLS

by Richard Russo (Knopf, $25.95) "Russo's depiction of this small town and those who are shaped by it is so lifelike, you will find yourself revisiting it long after you finish the book. Ribald, melancholy, and nearly perfect; Russo is a master of the intricacies of everyday lives."—JEAN WESTCOTT, OLSSON'S BOOKS & RECORDS, ARLINGTON, VA Also HarperAudio.



6. FIVE QUARTERS OF THE ORANGE

by Joanne Harris (William Morrow, $25) "Harris has hit her stride. This is better than CHOCOLAT, exquisitely written, filled with tension and dreams. No one else writes about food and people in quite the same way as Harris. You can taste the oranges and smell the fear." —MARYANN EASTMAN, WHITE BIRCH BOOKS, N. CONWAY, NH

MELINDA HAYNES
CHALKTOWN

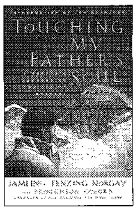
7. CHALKTOWN

by Melinda Haynes (Theia, $23.95) "The author follows her debut novel with a brilliant work that brings forth a wonderful collection of characters in the most bizarre town in Southern literature. Take home a copy of this lyrical prize today; an unforgettable read!" —JAKE REISS, THE ALABAMA BOOKSMITH, BIRMINGHAM, AL Also on S&S Audio.

A Perfect Arrangement
SUZANNE BERNE

8. A PERFECT ARRANGEMENT

by Suzanne Berne (Algonquin, $23.95) "It is very easy to slip into the separate worlds of these two modern parents, and to see how each step they took to cope with the demands of modern parenting and two incomes led them deeper and deeper into trouble. This was an engaging, believable, and captivating read."—TOM HEYWOOD, THE BABBLING BOOK, HAINES, AK



9. TOUCHING MY FATHER'S SOUL:

A Sherpa's Journey to the Top of Everest

by Jamling Tenzing Norgay (Harper San Francisco, $26) "The son of the first Sherpa to reach the Everest's summit has written a deeply affecting book that expands the boundaries of the mountain adventure genre. With humility and honesty, Jamling takes us on a journey of self-discovery that is both a family saga and a story of a life lived in two cultures. We are richer for his trip."—ROBBY BICK, BUNCH OF GRAPES, VINEYARD HAVEN, MA Also a HarperAudio.

DAVID MACFARLANE
THE DANGER TREE

10. THE DANGER TREE:

Memory, War, and the Search for a Family's Past

by David MacFarlane (Walker, $13.95 paper) "This is truly cause for celebration. Of the many Newfoundland books, this memoir, never published in paperback in the U.S., is simply the best. I am delighted and excited."—HENRY BERLINER, THE FOUNDRY BOOKSTORE, NEW HAVEN, CT

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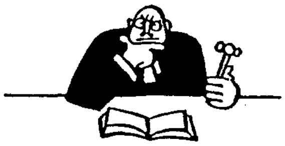
PERSONALITY - PASSION - KNOWLEDGE - COMMUNITY - CHARACTER

THE
NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

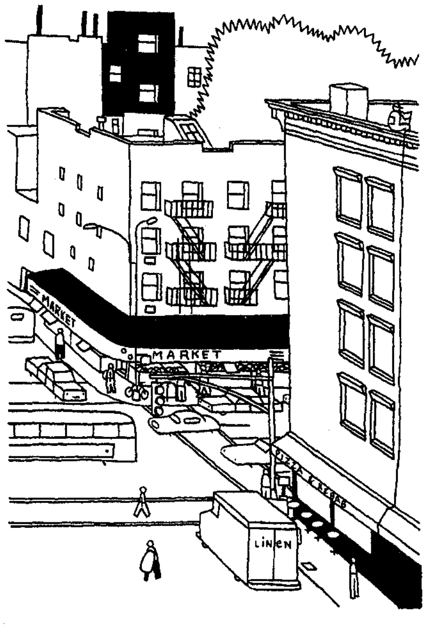
COMMENT
POLITICAL DEATH



On March 15, 1963, in a converted auto-repair shop on the grounds of the state penitentiary in Fort Madison, Iowa, a twenty-seven-year-old man named Victor Feguer was hanged by the neck until dead. Feguer was a banal and hapless criminal. For all but a few months of his wretched life from the age of thirteen until he died, he was confined to penal institutions. During one of two brief interludes of freedom, he robbed and murdered a stranger. Because he had taken his victim across a state boundary, he was tried in federal court. The only witnesses to his hanging were people who had to be there—prison employees, morticians, a priest, a few reporters.

Victor Feguer was the last person executed under the auspices of the federal government, a distinction that he will lose next week. The intervening thirty-eight years have been an era of progress. Hanging has been all but abandoned in this land of ours. (It is still an option in the State of Washington, but the inmate has to put in a special request.) It was always a nasty business. If the drop was too deep, the result could be decapitation; if too shallow, slow strangulation. Still, even when a hanging is done well it is an unpleasant thing to see and hear. One of the witnesses to Feguer's death, a retired newspaperman, is still troubled by the sound-memory of the surprisingly loud thunk-crack of the rope snapping and the neck breaking. The prisoner dangled limply, but his heart continued to beat for nine minutes and forty-five seconds.

The execution of Timothy McVeigh, on May 16th, in Terre Haute, Indiana, will be altogether tidier, thanks to the fashionable technique of lethal injection, which has many of the trappings of a medical "procedure." And McVeigh represents a better class of federal executee. He is a decorated Army veteran—a recipient of the Bronze Star for his service in the Gulf War. He is clinically sane. He is unrepentant. He killed a hundred and sixty-eight people. No one can say he was not responsible for his actions. Opponents of the death penalty find him a hard case.



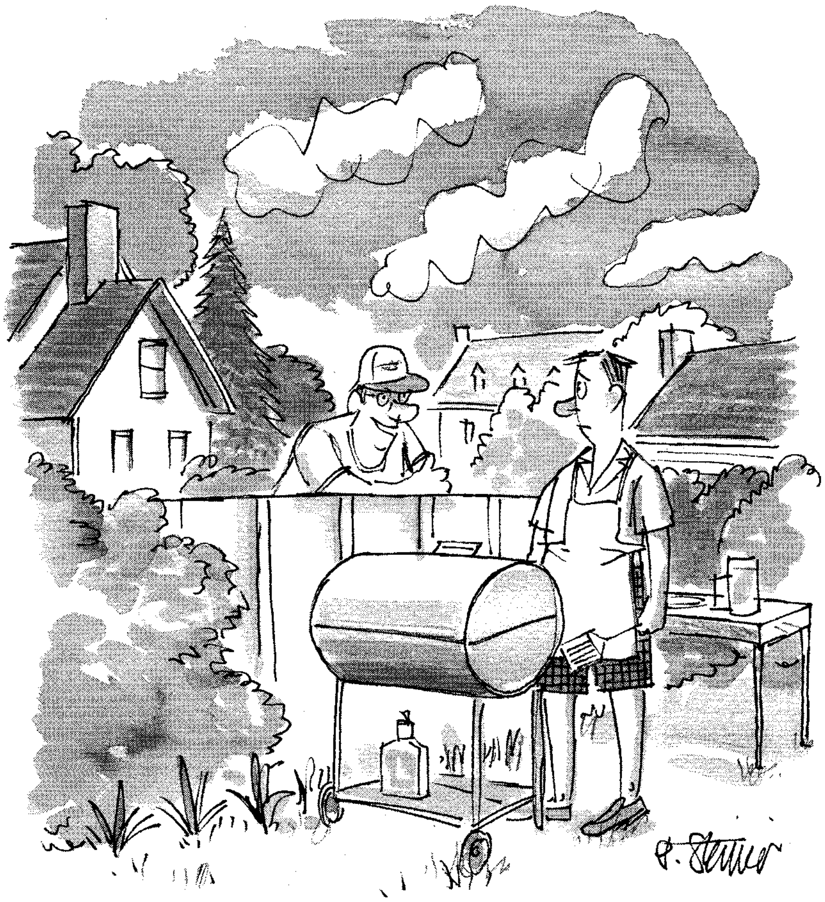
LAURENT CILLUFFO

Politically, though, capital punishment has been something of a non-issue since well before McVeigh came along. In 1988, Michael Dukakis's opposition to it helped cost him the Presidency; in 1994, Mario Cuomo's helped dislodge him from the governorship of New York. Politicians of the sort who used to oppose the death penalty—Bill Clinton, Al Gore, Joseph Lieberman, Charles Schumer, and Hillary Rodham Clinton are among the many names that spring to mind—now support it. Perhaps they are truly convinced, in the inmost reaches of conscience, that state-administered death is a good thing. A more charitable (some would say harsher) view is that they have made a Faustian bargain: they say they're for capital punishment, and in return they get to survive politically. Like many political compromises, it's not necessarily a bad deal. (Would their constituents really be better off represented by people who oppose progressive taxation, public health care, and environmental regulation?) The tactical retreat of the anti-execution forces echoes the tactical retreat of the anti-abortion forces. The latter no longer talk much about criminalizing abortion or forcing women impregnated by rape or incest to carry to term; they talk instead about "partial birth" and "parental notification." The former don't say they think it's wrong for the state to kill people (in fact, they say they think it's right); they say they're troubled by the disparate racial impact, or the possibility that an innocent person might be executed, or the shoddiness of legal representation. And, of course, these are wholly legitimate concerns.

It is often argued, especially in Europe, that the prevalence of official homicide in the United States bespeaks a peculiarly American coarseness: what else can you expect from a country full of fundamentalist zealots and gun nuts? But the truth is that you don't have to be American to like the death penalty. Support for it is as high in, for example, Britain (sixty-eight per cent) and the Czech Republic (sixty-seven per cent), both of which have abolished it, as it is in the United States (sixty-seven per cent in the most recent Gallup poll, down from eighty per cent in 1994). Even in gentle Canada, where there has not been an execution since 1962, support for capital punishment hovers at around fifty-five per cent. The real difference between them and us is that we have fifty-one governments (the states plus the feds) that have the right to decide for themselves about capital punishment, and each of those governments consists of independently elected executive and legislative branches—an arrangement that leaves plenty of scope for single-issue, hot-button politics. In Europe and Canada, only one outfit per country has that kind of power: the ruling party or coalition in the national parliament. Once a parliament abolishes capital punishment, it's very hard to un-abolish it. Even more important, the European Union has made abolition a de-facto condition of membership. A country that decided to bring back the gallows, the garrote, or the guillotine would have to pay a pretty steep price for the satisfaction of offing a few miscreants. But if capital punishment is ever to be abolished here, it will have to be done by the people, state by state and step by step. Our politicians won't save us from ourselves. They can't.

Even so, more and more Americans agree with something President Bush said a few weeks ago: "We understand how unfair the death penalty is." He meant the death *tax*, and quickly corrected himself. (Capital punishment *sí*, capital-gains punishment *no*.) He was right the first time. The prospects for small, incremental steps are actually quite good. Polls show growing, sometimes majority, support for moratoriums like the one decreed last year by George Ryan, the Republican governor of Illinois. There is movement here and there—even, in a modest way, in the Texas legislature—toward suspending the death penalty until it can be determined that it can be justly applied. Unfair in practice is not the same as wrong in principle, but it will have to do.

—*Hendrik Hertzberg*



"Just a heads-up, Jack—I've invited the Navy to use my back yard for bombing practice."

ON THE BOARDS
A CINDERELLA STORY

Last week, nineteen-year-old Jamie-Lynn Sigler, who plays Tony Soprano's daughter, Meadow, in the HBO series "The Sopranos," opened in the title role of "Cinderella" in the latest version of the Rodgers & Hammerstein musical. On hand for her big night at the Theatre at Madison Square Garden (there was also a splendid after-party) were a number of other Soprano-family cast members and a noticeable bunch of pre-teen-agers, accompanied by their parents.

Eleven-year-old Bianca Bethune, a pretty girl with long dark hair, was sitting in the audience with her mother. She had on a stiff, full-skirted, long white organdie dress, white stockings, white patent-leather slippers, a diamond necklace, a gold bracelet, a gold Mickey Mouse wristwatch, and a sparkling silvery tiara, which she won in a "Sunburst Beauty Pageant" a few years ago. Bianca and her mother spotted the "Sopranos" actors, who were seated not far from them in the audience—Robert Iler (Tony Soprano, Jr.), Aida Turturro (Tony's sister, Janice), John Ventimiglia (Artie, the restaurant chef-owner), Jason Cerbone (Meadow's boyfriend, Jackie Aprile, Jr.), and Tony Sirico (Paulie Walnuts). The actors were surrounded by autograph seekers. Bianca and her mother stayed put. Bianca was expressionless. Her mother did the talking.

"Bianca is in the fifth grade at St. Benedict private school in Holmdel, New Jersey," Mrs. Bethune said cheerfully. "Bianca is in school from eight o'clock to two-fifteen. After school, my aunt or I pick her up and take her to New York, where she attends Broadway Dance Center, Monday through Sunday. She does ballet, tap, jazz, hip-hop, point, theatre dance. She goes Saturdays nine to three and six to eight. She has a piano lesson once a week. She gets weekly private lessons with a voice teacher and an acting coach. When we get home, we always read the Bible before bed. We pray and don't ever forget to thank God for getting us to where we are. All this started when I took Bianca at eighteen months to Mommy and Me classes. As they say, you do what you got to do.

"Bianca won the contest for ballroom dancing at the Broadway Dance Center," Mrs. Bethune went on. "Jamie-Lynn Sigler was the judge. The prize was a limo picking Bianca up and taking her to Serendipity 3 for lunch with Jamie-Lynn, and then to the Virgin Megastore, where she got a bunch of CDs, and then a visit to the Avon Spa at Trump Tower, where she got a pedicure and a manicure. And we got these free V.I.P. seats to this opening. And a free souvenir 'Cinderella' hat and wand. And a limo that will take us to the party."

When the theatre went dark, the orchestra played the overture, and Eartha Kitt, as the Fairy Godmother, appeared. The audience erupted with cheers and screams and applause. When Jamie-Lynn Sigler came on, the screams and whistles of welcome were shattering, especially from the region of her fellow-actors. Bianca and her mother joined in cordially. When Cinderella, onstage, was first kissed by the Prince, everybody in the audience seemed to go nuts. Bianca and her mother were happy but calm. The pumpkin became the coach. The glass shoe fit. Cinderella and the Prince were married. The audience was hysterical, exhausted, and relieved.

"What a night!" Bianca's mother said. She sort of nudged her daughter.

"Well," Bianca said tentatively. "I saw it so many times before, and as a cartoon on television, too."

" 'Cinderella' has been one of her favorites for years," Mrs. Bethune said.

At the party, at the restaurant One 51, Bianca ran into a girl her age, named Allison Flood, with whom she had appeared in a Burger King commercial.

"We jumped up and down together in a crowd and screamed and hollered," Bianca said. For the first time that evening, she smiled.

Holding a disposable camera, Bianca tried to get photographed with Jamie-Lynn Sigler, but Sigler's fellow "Sopranos" actors got there first, in a tight ring. They seemed to fall immediately into their "Sopranos" characters.

Janice said to Meadow, "You did beautifully up there. I'm so excited. Your voice is unbelievable. And that's the truth."

Jamie-Lynn Sigler, a.k.a. Meadow

TOM BACHTELL

Tony, Jr., said, "I didn't know you could sing like that."

Artie (the chef) said, "You're great, and you're in a musical. I'm jealous."

Paulie Walnuts said, "You're a wonderful actress. I've got a tear in my eye." He gave a menacing smile and pinched someone's cheek (forcefully).

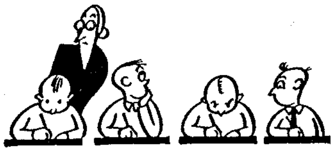
Meadow (she was wearing a skimpy, tight, shiny dress that might have startled even Tony) took all the compliments about going from being Meadow to being Cinderella in stride. "I'm a chameleon," she said.

It was almost midnight. Bianca was finally getting photographed with Cinderella. Someone asked Bianca's mother if she was ready to take the limo with Bianca and go home.

"No way," Bianca's mother said. "We've got to work the room."

—*Lillian Ross*

DEPT. OF TRIVIA
THE HONORABLE ANSWER MAN



The chances that an American adult will get to the "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire" hot seat in any given eighteen-month period are about one in three hundred and fifty thousand. But if he or she happens to be a former law clerk of Judge Danny J. Boggs, of the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals, the chances are one in fifteen. Boggs's chambers, in Louisville, Kentucky, have become a sort of minor-league hotbed—a San Pedro de Macorís—for young trivia buffs eager to appear on "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire." Of the forty-five clerks who have worked under him since he was sworn in, fifteen years ago, three have made it to the show's hot seat, which is where you've got to be if you want to make a million. Just last month, one of them won two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, which isn't bad.

There is a reason for this. Each year, Boggs, a Cuban-born fifty-six-year-old polymath, administers what he calls a "general knowledge" test—he avoids the term "trivia"—to the roughly one hundred law-school graduates he is considering for his clerkships. Last year's quiz had seventy-one questions, including "Who gave the famous speech 'Ain't I a Woman?' " (Sojourner Truth); "What does the Herfindahl-Hirschman index measure?" (industry concentration); and "Who killed (a) Duncan (b) McKinley (c) Cock Robin (d) Ron Goldman, and (e) Vaudeville?" (Macbeth, Czolgosz, the sparrow with the bow and arrow, etc.) The Judge seems to have a thing for questions involving Shakespeare, T. S. Eliot, and the phrase "order of magnitude." For most aspiring lawyers, the quiz is not easy. The average score is about thirty per cent.

"When I got the test, I thought, Wow—Danny Boggs has got to be the coolest judge in the world," Brian Kalt, a Yale Law School graduate who clerked with Boggs three years ago and was on the show last year, said the other day. "Immediately, I knew I wanted to work for this guy." Other applicants, however, have been put off by it. "I don't think the quiz has any legitimate screening function," said one of Kalt's law-school classmates, who withdrew his application to Boggs after seeing the quiz. "He might as well have assigned us a challenging home-repair project."

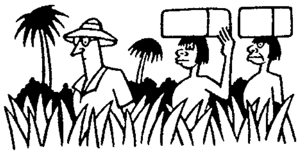
Maybe so. But Boggs sees value in a test that asks applicants to identify the world's most populous city beginning with "O," to provide, within an order of magnitude, the number of photocopies made in the United States each year, to define an Orc, an Ent, and the Oort, to distinguish Belisarius from Bucephalus from Bocephus, to name three quarks, and to solve the following: "If the moon were made of green cheese, and if green cheese floats in water, what is the most that the moon could weigh (within a factor of ten)?" "It's not just knowing a fact that's important," Boggs said recently. "It's that you've read widely enough to learn it. I have had some tremendous autodidacts."

The quiz has also helped Boggs find potential star clerks at less prestigious law schools. "I hired a person from Vermont Law School a few years back," he said. "This is someone I would not have taken a serious look at without the quiz." A good score, however, does not guarantee a job offer. "I think the highest score I ever saw was seventy-five per cent. The applicant was forty-five years old and he obviously knew lots and lots of stuff. But I didn't hire him. He had terrible grades."

Boggs is quite fond of "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire" and has tried to get on it himself. He has aced the touch-tone quiz on its automated phone line several times, but he has never been selected in the random drawing that follows. His voice, however, has made it onto the show. Two of the three former clerks who appeared on "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire" picked Boggs as their Phone-a-Friend lifeline—the person you call on the phone when you're stuck trying to answer a question on the air. Last year, the Judge came through for Kalt, feeding him the answer (the Royal Navy) to his thirty-two-thousand-dollar question ("In which force did Jack Aubrey, hero of Patrick O'Brian's twenty novels, serve?"). And, during an episode last month, while struggling with a question that, if answered correctly, would have earned him five hundred thousand dollars ("How many actors passed through the Three Stooges comedy trio?"), Henry Olsen, another former clerk, called on Boggs. This time, the Judge was stumped. "That's way out of my league," he said. Olsen threw in the towel and walked away with a quarter-million dollars. (The answer, by the way, was six.)

—*Jonathan Kay*

LONER DEPT.
OUT OF THE WOODS



Standing in the Clark Room at the Explorers Club, on the Upper East Side, a few weeks ago, the conservation biologist J. Michael Fay was feeling a bit like a pygmy on display. He had just returned from a data-collecting tour of Africa, where he spent fifteen months hacking his way across nearly two thousand miles of uncharted tropical forest—a journey he calls the Megatransect—and he was slightly wary of the polite society that had gathered to hear him talk about his adventure.

Fay, who wears round eyeglasses and has a square chin and a shock of upstanding gray hair, found himself peppered with questions. "Why did you wear rubber sandals?" "How did you deal with the insects?" "What did you want to eat when you got out of the woods?"

He responded to all these inquiries with equanimity, but in truth he couldn't wait to get out of there—out of the mahogany-panelled rooms of the Explorers Club, out of high-rise buildings, out of his clothes.

Fifteen minutes into the slide show, Fay's shirttails were flapping and his Bass Weejuns were unlaced. Since 1980, Fay has lived in the Central African Republic and the Congo, where he has studied orchids, lowland gorillas, and forest elephants while working to create two national parks. He conceived the Megatransect, which was co-sponsored by the National Geographic Society and the Wildlife Conservation Society—his employer for the past eleven years—to systematically survey the flora and fauna of vast uninhabited regions and to explore the dynamic between humans and species in the wild. It was sometimes unclear, as the evening wore on, which group he belonged to.

"When I got out of the forest and reached the Gabonese coast, it was three days before I would even think about putting on a shirt," Fay said after his presentation. "I wasn't jonesing for anything. I just wanted to stay out there, to keep going. I didn't want to shower or drink a cold beer or eat a hamburger."

Fay made his way to Libreville by boat, car, and plane. "I had to put on shoes and socks. I felt like a kid forced to dress up for church. I was, like, 'Get this stuff off my body.' " At his hotel, he slept on the floor. At times, he went outside to urinate. "I'm still doing that," he said in his hepcat drawl.

He is spending the next few months in Washington, D.C., setting up computer programs to store the data he has collected. He said that he finds the city "insane." "I haven't seen any wildlife here except ravens and squirrels," he said. "Everyone picks up dog shit." Then, there's the traffic, the crowds, the houses with three bedrooms instead of two. "Why would anyone want a new kitchen? For me, personally, it's of zero importance. I never thought, Oh, now that I'm out of the woods, I can get a cool apartment and start buying cool stuff for it. No, that ain't happenin'."

While Fay completes his database, he plans to live on the streets of Washington, moving camp each night and foraging for food. And when he gets back home to Africa he'll start an even longer walk through the bush.

"I'm not trying to make a point by not sleeping in a bed and by not driving a car," Fay said. "You just don't need all this stuff. I hardly buy food. People are always giving me something—a cookie or a banana in the office. There's food everywhere. You go for cocktails and there are hors d'oeuvres and cheese and crackers. After that, you go out for dinner! Who can eat all this stuff?"

With his slides neatly packed up, Fay set down his glass of white wine, slung his satchel over his shoulder, and headed out to a dinner in his honor.

—*Elizabeth Royte*

THE FINANCIAL PAGE

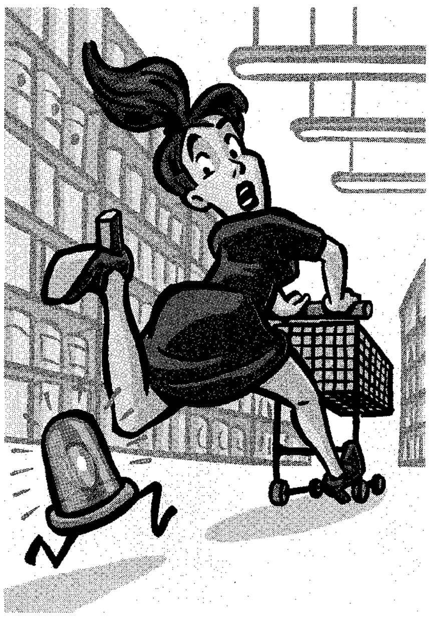
IN THE AISLE OF BLUE LIGHT

The Astor Place Kmart, in the East Village, is all about the color blue. Big billboards with tag lines like "Remain calm" and "Goose bumps ahead" feature pictures of streaking blue comets and lighthouses sending out beams of blue light. Blue banners advertise "Blue Light Zone!" and "Fantastic Savings Just Ahead." And in the middle of the store a blue canopy hangs from the ceiling, above a blue police light.

The blue is all part of Kmart's new, thirty-million-dollar marketing campaign, which has as its centerpiece the resurrection of a hoary Kmart tradition, the Blue Light Special. As Dave Karraker, a Blue Light Special spokesman, explained it to me, the new Blue Light Special is supposed to work like this: every hour on the hour, in every Kmart store in America, a voice over the intercom blares, "Attention Kmart shoppers!," the blue police light starts flashing, music kicks in (E.L.O.'s "Mr. Blue Sky," Johnny Cash's "Blue Train"), and some brand-name product (Samsung microwave ovens, Hanes T-shirts) appears on a cart beneath the canopy, available, for twenty thrilling minutes, at a significantly reduced price. "It's a reward for our regular customers—kind of a treasure hunt," Karraker said. "It's a carnivalesque atmosphere. People love that kind of stuff." They love it so much, apparently, that Kmart is trying to rebuild its struggling brand around it.

The other day, I went to Astor Place, just after noon, to see the carnival for myself. I asked a clerk when the show would begin, and she said, "Whenever the manager gets around to it." Perhaps customer service could be more specific. As I waited in line, the customer-service rep was talking to a colleague who was leaving for the day. "You are *so* lucky," he said to her. "You don't have to spend your afternoon in Kmart." Then he turned his attention to me. He, too, seemed to think that the Blue Light Special occurred at random. And what was that day's particular product? He made a couple of phone calls, and then told me, "Epsom salts, for a dollar." Epsom salts? I tried to remain calm.

The original Blue Light Special was the creation of a Kmart store manager in Fort Wayne, Indiana, who was frustrated that his customers couldn't find the wrapping paper he had on sale after Christmas. This was in 1965. He attached a flashing red police light to a long pipe, put the contraption on a stockroom cart, and set it next to the wrapping-paper section. The sale, which went on for fifteen minutes, was a hit. Six months later, every Kmart in the country had a flashing police light (now blue instead of red). The blue light lasted for twenty-five years and was integral to Kmart's image, especially when, in the late seventies, the company seemed poised to become the world's dominant retailer.



The blue light was a clever twist on an old trick: the markdown sale, a retail strategy dating back to the late-nineteenth-century explosion in the mass production and distribution of consumer goods. Previously, the retail business had been a low-volume, high-price game, but giant new retailers like Marshall Field and Macy's discovered that it made better sense to sell more stuff for less. They began slashing prices on slow-moving items and promoting them in special sales. Soon they were using markdowns on popular items to lure people into their stores. Around the turn of the century, the May Company, for instance, ran ads that read, "Where on God's Good Green Earth outside of our House will you find men morally brave enough to place on sale, on the very threshold of the busy season, our Sixteen Hundred . . . seasonable and stylish suits at TEN DOLLARS FOR THE CHOICE?" Stores also grew more inventive in the way they sold goods, turning to people like C. H. Lockhart, a legendary travelling pitchman. During the nineteen-twenties, he walked through department stores, riffing into a megaphone on the day's remarkable deals, as customers trailed him up and down the aisles. He was a one-man blue light.

A century of sales has trained Americans to be what marketers call "deal-prone." Studies suggest that customers don't even blink at discounts of less than ten per cent. Twenty per cent? Maybe. Forty per cent? Now you're talking. Still, jaded as consumers can be, they continue to love an unexpected bargain. In economist-speak, a bargain maximizes the "transaction utility" of a purchase—the satisfaction you get not from using what you buy but from the act of buying it.

The problem is that it's hard to build a real business on transaction utility. Everyone likes a sale, but if you identify your company too closely with markdowns—as Kmart is doing—you end up looking cut-rate. People think you're trying to dump your rejects, rather than delivering real value. (In its earlier go-round, the Blue Light Special became a synonym for generic, off-the-rack clothing, and was killed in 1991.) In recent years, Kmart's main competitors, Wal-Mart and Target, have outflanked it by emphasizing more durable, substantial inducements: Wal-Mart's everyday low prices and Target's cheap chic. Kmart, with the exception of its recent alliance with Martha Stewart, has had nothing to distinguish itself, which may be why it has resorted to reviving a primitive gimmick associated with its glory days. But you can't build a brand around bells and whistles, even if they come with a twenty-first-century gloss.

That's assuming they come at all. In the Astor Place store the other day, I stood next to the blue police light at one o'clock, waiting to hear "Mr. Blue Sky." Nothing happened. The light did not flash, the music did not play. There would be no Epsom salts for me that day.

—*James Surowiecki*

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U.S. JOURNAL

NEVER SURRENDER

The Sons of Confederate Veterans have a bad day at the mall.

BY MARK SINGER

SHREVEPORT, LOUISIANA

Once Lynda Estes and Paul Gramling, Jr., decided to get married, it naturally followed that the wedding would take place in April, because that's Confederate History Month. When they met, four years ago in Nashville, during the national convention of the Sons of Confederate Veterans, Paul Gramling was a member of a contingent from Louisiana and Lynda Estes was with a guest delegation from the United Daughters of the Confederacy. At the time, she lived in a small northeast-Texas town a couple of hours from Gramling's home, in Shreveport. They had each been married twice before, to people who lacked, as Estes puts it, "the interest and the love that Paul and I have for our history and our heritage." Neither of Gramling's ex-wives, for instance, had a closet full of crinolines, lace-up boots, frilly pantaloons, corsets, and long-sleeved dresses with hoopskirts and brocade-trimmed bodices, or a passion for refurbishing Confederate monuments, manicuring Confederate cemeteries, and baking cakes to raise money to restore antique Confederate flags. And Estes's ex-husbands had shown no propensity for attiring themselves in rigorously authentic Confederate officer's garb and making proselytizing visits to schools to "teach the

A Confederate salute at the wedding of Paul Gramling, left, and Lynda Estes. "My mother truth" about all that fussing and fighting between the North and the South in the middle of the nineteenth century.

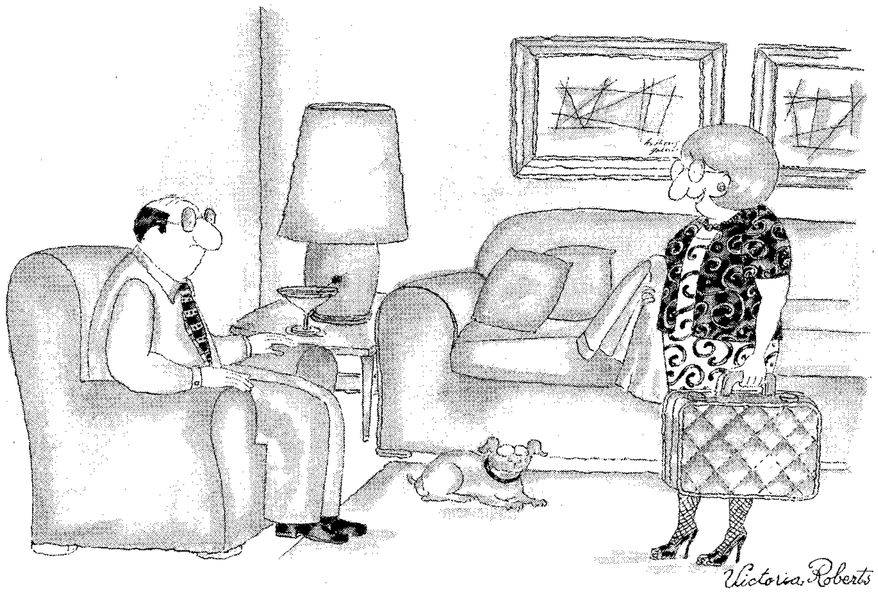
Estes and Gramling next saw each other several months later, in Merryville, Louisiana, the site of a mock Civil War battle. An affinity for battle reënactments was what had originally attracted Gramling to the Sons of Confederate Veterans. During the summer of 1990, a couple of co-workers had invited him to accompany them to Mississippi for the Battle of Vicksburg, because, he says plausibly, "I looked the part." Gramling, who is forty-four, is tall and has swept-back auburn hair that reaches his broad shoulders; a drooping mustache; and an exhibitionist predilection that wouldn't necessarily be evident to someone who had observed him only in his day job, as a mailman. The Vicksburg reënactment took place on a sweltering weekend, during which he "wore a wool uniform, got dirty, sweaty, thirsty, and hungry, and loved every minute of it." Soon, he began attending Sons of Confederate Veterans meetings as a visitor, and then he did the genealogical spadework that enabled him to become an official member. On his mother's side, he turned up a great-great-grandfather who served as a second lieutenant in the Confederate States Army, survived the Battle of Gettysburg, and spent the last year and a half of the Civil War in a prison camp.

Though Estes, who is fifty-two, waited until she was in her mid-thirties to enlist in the United Daughters of the Confederacy, she would probably have done so as a teen-ager if there had been a chapter in her home town. Not that she received any encouragement from her family. "My mother could care less about her heritage," she told me. "She says I live in the past. Which is totally false." Indeed, when Estes gets going about the Confederate veteran in whose name she signed up—her great-grandfather Benjamin Thomas Smith, who was wounded in three different battles, fought at Gettysburg on the same bloody ground as Gramling's Confederate ancestor, and, likewise, was captured and imprisoned by the Union Army—she uses the present tense. "I almost feel that part of his spirit is in me," she says. "He just seems to have a fighting spirit. He gets knocked down and gets up and keeps going."

During their second encounter, Estes and Gramling spoke candidly about their pride as Southerners, a conversation that she recalls as "very long and deep . . . about how we have these feelings deep down inside and we can't put them into words to explain to anyone." The way he expressed himself, with a missionary fervor about the rightness of the Southern cause and the wrongness of the way most historians have portrayed the conflict, made her think he'd be an ideal candidate for the Jefferson Davis Historical Medal, which the United Daughters of the Confederacy gives to men and women for "excellence in history, essay writing, or declamation." So she nominated him, and he received the award a few months later, during a ceremony that coincided with his swearing-in as commander of the Louisiana division of the Sons of Confederate Veterans.

A couple of years passed before Estes and Gramling's friendship blossomed

could care less about her heritage," Estes said. "She says I'm living in the past. Which is totally false." Photograph by Sylvia Plachy.



"I'm running away to join the W.N.B.A."

into romance. Along the way, he continued what had been a steady rise through the hierarchy of the organization. At the national convention last year, he was elected commander of the Army of the Trans-Mississippi. Among the thirty thousand members, two others hold the title of army commander, and only the commander-in-chief and the lieutenant commander-in-chief rank higher. These days, Gramling's official responsibilities are so demanding he rarely finds the time to participate in battle reënactments. But he welcomes any opportunity to be in uniform, and whenever a situation arises that calls for him to uphold the sacred honor of the Confederacy—the Battle of Pierre Bossier Mall being the most recent noteworthy episode—he feels duty-bound to put his body on the line.

Certain details of what happened on the first Sunday in April at the Pierre Bossier Mall, in Bossier City—Shreveport's suburban neighbor, on the opposite bank of the Red River—are in dispute. What's not debatable is that a convivial get-together of members of the Northwest Louisiana Brigade of the Sons of Confederate Veterans ended with a substantial number, very much against their will, being evicted from the mall.

The brigade had arranged to inaugurate Confederate History Month with a luncheon at Bennigan's, a chain restaurant inside the enclosed mall. This was preceded by a low-key, informal procession—fifty or so people, members of the Sons of Confederate Veterans and their families, the majority in uniform, sauntering with Confederate flags for about a mile along the Red River. When the entourage arrived at Bennigan's, they retired to a private room decorated with more flags. (Between 1861 and 1865, the Confederate national flag evolved through three incarnations. The flag of the Confederacy most familiar nowadays—the one that incites the hostility of people who consider it a racist emblem—is the battle flag: a blue St. Andrew's cross with white stars on a red field.) As the revelry inside Bennigan's wound down, one member—whose compatriots think of him as a likable fellow despite his insistence on bringing his bagpipes to their gatherings—stepped outside the restaurant, into one of the mall's corridors, and began playing. He was soon joined by a couple of flag-toting allies.

Either the bagpipes or the flags, or both, got the attention of a couple of mall security guards. This, in turn, got the attention of Gramling and Chuck McMichael, a Shreveport high-school teacher, who is the national chief of staff of the Sons of Confederate Veterans. The bagpiping would have to stop, the security guards said, a request that Gramling and McMichael deemed reasonable. Also, according to the guards, the flags weren't allowed in the mall, an edict that struck them as less reasonable. "Chuck and I asked them why," Gramling told me. "They never would give us a reason. They just pointed us to a sign near the door and said all the rules for the mall were there." By the time Gramling and McMichael read the rules—and discovered no mention of a prohibition against flags—the security guards had moved on. "We went ahead anyway and put the flags in our cars," Gramling said. "While we were doing that, a lady from Massachusetts asked us to pose for a photograph. She said we were the first real Southerners she'd seen. Then we went back inside to walk around. No flags, no bagpipes. Just citizens dressed in Confederate uniforms walking through a mall."

One of the mall's posted rules banned gatherings of more than five people, a policy presumably written with loitering teen-agers in mind. As Gramling, McMichael, Lynda Estes, and about a dozen other stragglers from the luncheon set out on a window-shopping stroll, they were careful to divide into groups of five or fewer. Estes and Gramling stopped by a jewelry store where they'd bought their wedding rings—hers in white gold, his in yellow gold, each with a central diamond flanked by a pair of diamond-studded battle flags. A few minutes later, they were again approached by the same security guards, who ordered them off the premises.

As the incident played out over the next few days in the Shreveport *Times*, it seemed that the mall personnel hadn't got their stories straight about what had happened. Or, more likely, they knew what had happened, and why, but saw no advantage in saying so explicitly. One spokesperson floated the explanation that the Sons of Confederate Veterans had been banished because they didn't have a permit to hold an organized event inside the mall, for which liability insurance was required. Estes, Gramling, and McMichael insisted, however, that the security guards—a white female and an African-American male who happened to be an off-duty Bossier City police officer—had never raised that subject. "We were asked to leave the mall because of the way we dressed," Estes told a reporter. "We asked why, and [the female guard] said because of the uniforms. She called them 'gray suits.' " Evidently, it was the men's clothing, rather than Estes's hoopskirted tea dress, that offended. Somehow, the Sons of Confederate Veterans had done something wrong. But it was hard to say just what that was, because, technically, they hadn't really done anything wrong.

In Gramling's estimation, he and his friends had been treated like "common criminals" by "rude, obnoxious, and condescending" security guards: "They did not *ask* us to leave; they *told* us to leave." As the retinue exited, they were greeted by three Bossier City police cars. The experience, Gramling said, made him feel "humiliated."

What was it, exactly, about a motley collection of mainly overweight men dressed in heavy gray nineteenth-century suits—a gaggle of still-pissed-off-about-the-war-but-otherwise-minding-their-own-business white guys—that was so objectionable? Presumably, it was the assumption that the uniforms connoted an allegiance to a cause that only a bigoted redneck provocateur could embrace. But, in fact, one doesn't have to spend a lot of time in the presence of Sons of Confederate Veterans members, as I did in the days following their ejection from the Pierre Bossier Mall, to recognize the fallacy of writing them off as pro-slavery racists. Many harbor political opinions that qualify as reactionary, and there's plenty of Lincoln-bashing. For the most part, however, the group is preoccupied with "heritage violations" that have little to do with contemporary political debates of consequence. The humiliation that Gramling spoke of—along with its companion emotions, the mantle of martyrdom and the hope of resurrection—has, since Appomattox, constituted the bedrock of Southern devotion to the "Lost Cause." A moonlight-and-magnolias romanticism, coupled with a strangely comforting sense of being dispossessed, runs through all this, but it doesn't add up to a calculated effort to distort history.

Southern history, the story of a region steeped in storytelling, has a habit of doubling back on itself. How was it possible for the Sons of Confederate Veterans, reflecting upon their bum's rush out of a shopping mall—the sort of affront that Southern black people, even beyond the Jim Crow era, had to put up with every day (along with unspeakably worse indignities)—not to appreciate the historical paradox? It was during my second day in Shreveport, while I was attending a meeting of the General Richard Taylor Camp No. 1308—Gramling's chapter of the Sons of Confederate Veterans, the largest in Louisiana—that the thought occurred to me that one of the prerequisites for membership might actually be, in addition to a soldier in the family tree, a congenital immunity to irony.

The General Richard Taylor Camp convenes for dinner and camaraderie on the first Thursday of every month, at an El Chico Mexican restaurant in southeast Shreveport. The April meeting agenda was already crowded—thanks to Confederate History Month—when the Pierre Bossier Mall imbroglio crowded it some more. Many logistical details pertaining to the Sons of Confederate Veterans Ball—which was two days away, and which, for the sake of convenience and economy, would double as the Estes-Gramling wedding reception—had to be dealt with. Another pressing matter was a potential heritage-violation situation involving the Bossier City Fire Department. At seven o'clock, the camp commander gave the call to order. Sixty stalwarts, dressed in casual civilian clothes, and ranging from their twenties to their early seventies, some with wives and children in tow, rose for the presentation of the colors, which was followed by a spirited rendition of "Dixie," with musical accompaniment generated by a boom box.

The commander made a few announcements—including an exhortation to attend an upcoming rally in Jackson, Mississippi, where a referendum on that state's flag design was imminent—and then called upon Chuck McMichael to give a status report on the Bossier City Fire Department. Several African-American firefighters, it seemed, had complained about racially offensive workplace conditions, and in response the fire chief had forbidden employees to display Confederate insignia on their clothing or personal vehicles. One white firefighter, feeling that his constitutional rights were being infringed, had got in touch with McMichael, who was happy to intervene. After McMichael and the Bossier City fire chief had a conversation, the insignia ban on vehicles was rescinded.

"Several good things came out of this," McMichael said. "One, I told the

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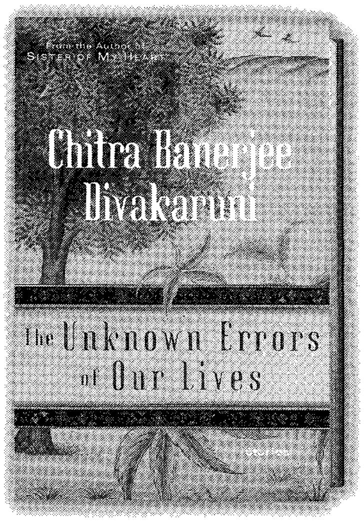

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chief I appreciated him letting us be part of the process. And he said, 'Oh, thank you for the education. I've learned a lot.' I've also offered to have the Sons of Confederate Veterans come and do a little multicultural-diversity training for his firefighters on the meaning of Confederate symbols. He sounds interested. What this shows is that when you have truth you have the mightiest weapon of all."

A hearty round of applause ensued, a burst of enthusiasm surpassed a few minutes later when Paul Gramling, after offering a chronology of the events that took place earlier that week at the mall, concluded with a bold peroration: "And now I'm going to get up on my soapbox. I, personally—because of my heritage, because of my ancestors, because of where I live—I am tired of being treated like a second-class citizen. You take any other nationality, creed, race, ethnic group, special-interest group, you name it—you say one bad word about them and you're marked. Except for the Southerner. We're the only class of people that it's politically correct to ridicule and bash and demonize. And I am tired of it." This was greeted with a standing ovation.

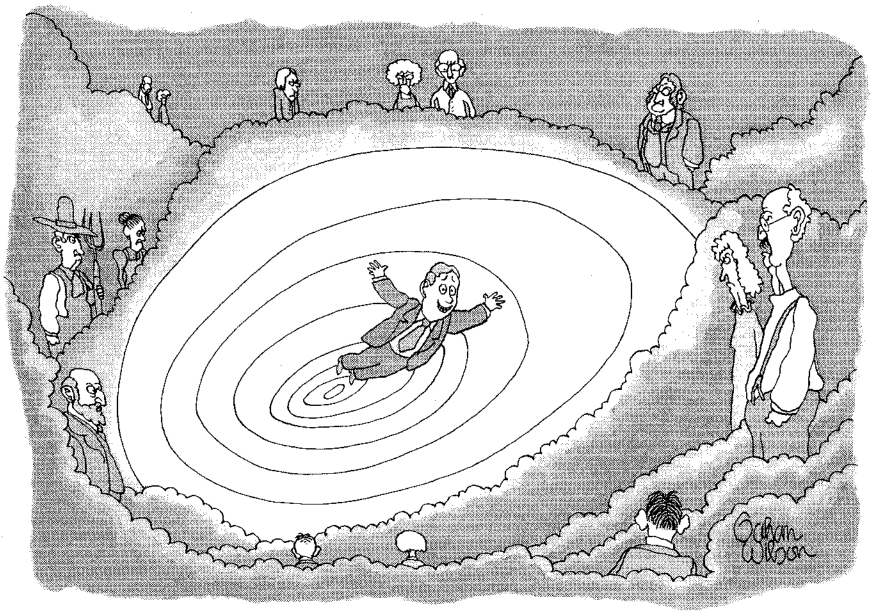
"I, for one, will never again darken the hallways of that mall," said one of the older members.

"I was in the mall before Christmas, and you couldn't even get into the stores because of the roving groups of black teen-agers," his wife interjected.

McMichael had a novel suggestion: "What you might do, if you decide to buy something out there, is pay cash and stamp a battle flag on each bill. And if it's a five-dollar bill"—time for some Lincoln-bashing—"you might want to make some other alterations. A hole puncher works nice."

The most peculiar moment of the evening, serendipitously, was saved for last. The camp commander announced that a "special guest" would lead a final chorus of "Dixie." With this, a restaurant employee named Lessie Taylor, a middle-aged African-American woman, wearing bluejeans and a red El Chico T-shirt, stepped to the front of the room. A man standing next to me recognized her and said, "You're the one who told me a few weeks ago how much you love this song." "It's true," replied Taylor. "I do." And then, as she posed with a battle flag on a long pole and smiled opaquely, the music played and the faithful crooned. Afterward, John Andrew Prime, a Shreveport *Times* reporter who happened to be present, took Taylor's photograph.

When I headed to my car, Vernon Love, the bagpiper who had got things rolling at the mall, stood on the sidewalk, shouldering his instrument, getting ready to play again. I drove half a block to a convenience store, where signs posted outside said "Pants Below the Waist Not Allowed—Shoes and Shirt Required" and "No Playing of Loud Music in Parking Lot." From a hundred yards away, I could hear Vernon Love all too clearly. As loud as any boom box, he rendered the evening's final iteration of "Dixie," clotting the moist spring air like glue.



"Damn, looks like that snotty kid of Ben and Edna's is coming up the tunnel of light!"

The wedding of Lynda Estes and Paul Gramling had been scheduled for four o'clock on Saturday afternoon at Caspiana House, a restored plantation cottage that is one of a half-dozen antebellum and turn-of-the-century buildings gathered in a corner of the sprawling campus of Louisiana State University-Shreveport. I arrived around one o'clock—Gramling had told me that, in the hours before the ceremony, he'd be participating in a living-history exhibit—and was impressed to find the parking lots packed. The cars, it turned out, belonged to spectators at an all-day soccer tournament, and I drove around for several minutes until I came upon a small concentration of vehicles with bumper stickers imprinted with battle flags and slogans like "Pride Not Prejudice" and "Heritage Not Hate" and "I Have a Dream" (illustrated with a battle flag flying above the U.S. Capitol). I found Gramling smoking a cigarette under the canvas roof of a field office that had been set up by the West Battery, an artillery-ordnance reënactment unit. Every hour, the troops fired a cannon, as clusters of soccer moms and dads and kids looked on.

As the guests arrived—there were about a hundred, a majority in period attire—I began to feel out of place in my beige summer suit, white shirt, and red necktie. Then I got over it. I certainly didn't suffer from Confederate-uniform envy. Nor did I think the women, not many of whom were especially svelte, seemed all that comfortable in their corsets. Gramling wore a pearl-gray wool general's coat, a charcoal gabardine vest with black buttons, a white formal shirt with a ruffled front, gray wool trousers, cavalry-officer black boots, and about a dozen beribboned medals. Estes had on a Confederate gray satin hoopskirt with a white-rose-and-seed-pearl bodice, and lace mitts, and carried a bouquet of silk flowers. In one of my early conversations with the couple, I committed the faux pas of referring to "costumes" instead of period attire. As I surveyed the guests, it wasn't clear to me what difference the nomenclature made. The fact was that this was a crowd of middle-middle-class folk who had chosen to devote their discretionary spending to cultivate the illusion that they were the rekindled embodiment of the plantation aristocracy. I wondered what they did for Halloween.

We gathered at the veranda of the Caspiana House to witness the ceremony. Keenan Williams, the chaplain of the Army of the Trans-Mississippi and a minister in real life, recited the vows from a Civil War-vintage Methodist prayer book. At the end of the service, the cannon fired one more time, the bride and groom kissed, and, as they descended from the veranda, two rows of men, in variegated uniforms, all armed with sabres, faced each other and raised their weapons to form an arch for the wedding party. This final bit of pageantry was choreographed by Chuck McMichael, who told me afterward, "Considering how little we rehearsed, we count ourselves lucky that no one lost an eye."

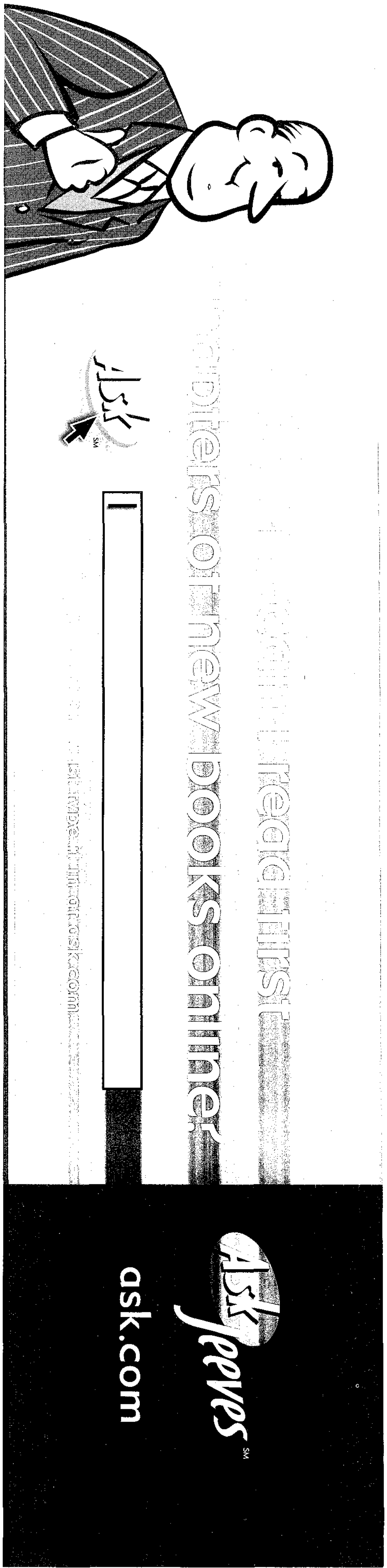
A feature article about the wedding appeared prominently in the next day's Shreveport *Times*, along with a photograph of Lessie Taylor holding the flag and singing "Dixie" at the General Richard Taylor Camp meeting. According to the most recent census, Shreveport's population is now slightly more than fifty per cent African-American, which would suggest that the photograph had at least half the readers scratching their heads. Or maybe not. Perhaps there was just a collective shrugging of shoulders.

Shreveport is a place with a long history of boom and bust (cotton, lumber, oil and gas). The latest boom got under way seven years ago, with the advent of casino gambling. Oddly, though the casinos have kept unemployment low, the population hasn't budged significantly in the last twenty years. One's net impression is of a middling city of finite charm and an ingrained reluctance to press its luck.

Six weeks before the Sons of Confederate Veterans became newsworthy, the least charming side of Shreveport showed its face during a Mardi Gras parade. African-American members of two high-school marching bands were subjected to racist taunts and allegedly pelted with beer cans and other objects by groups of young men waving Rebel flags. An African-American member of the city council proposed a resolution, which was unanimously adopted, calling for a police investigation, and an African-American law firm pledged five thousand dollars to any reward fund that might be set up to help apprehend the malefactors. But no such fund ever materialized, and the police haven't made any arrests. Nor, according to the assistant police chief in charge of the investigation, are they likely to.

I also spoke with a lot of black people in Shreveport. I heard considerable speculation that the black security guard at the mall, when he encountered the Sons of Confederate Veterans, probably had the Mardi Gras ugliness in mind. What I didn't hear in those conversations was any sympathy for the Sons of Confederate Veterans. A clergyman and newspaper columnist named Gregory Hudson said, "Do you realize how angry, how bitter, and how sorry you have to be as a white man not to be successful in the South? Everything is designed in your favor. Ninety per cent of the businesses are owned by Southern white men. So how can you feel discriminated against? What part of Southern heritage do these guys want remembered, anyway?" In any event, the Pierre Bossier Mall owners are not apologizing. Two days after the wedding, the general manager issued a statement to the effect that the security guards had "acted appropriately . . . in the best interests of the tenants, customers and children in the mall."

Contrary to popular understanding, Robert E. Lee's capitulation at Appomattox Court House, on April 9, 1865, did not mark the official end of the war. From Richmond, Jefferson Davis fled southwest, bound for Shreveport, possessed of the idea that if he could reach that destination—the headquarters of the Trans-Mississippi Department—he might be able to broker better terms for a conditional surrender. He got as far as Georgia before being captured. Shreveport itself, the last Confederate command to surrender, held out until May 26th. In "The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government," Davis wrote, "It was at Shreveport that the Confederate flag ceased forever to float over land." The Louisiana Sons of Confederate Veterans would say that Davis was in far too pessimistic a frame of mind. They can freshly recall the Battle of Pierre Bossier Mall. And, at last report, they were still weighing their options, as if it mattered. ♦



SHOUTS & MURMURS

MY ASSOCIATE

BY JIM WINDOLF

Any parent with a job knows how hard it is to leave a child at home when it's time to go to work. The difficulty is most severe when the child in question is two years old. Two is old enough to understand what's going on—but to understand it poorly. Two is old enough to hate you for leaving. Two is tough.

One morning, I happened to be standing at the mirror with my two-year-old son, Billy, and I said to my wife, "Don't we look like a pair of fine young gentlemen?"

She said, "No."

And that was that. But the idea must have stayed with me as the days and nights piled up on top of each other in the corner.

In the mornings, I would literally sweat as I left him in his chair, with the babysitter and "Blue's Clues"; in the evenings, I would feel like a skulker for shooting out of the office when the clock first showed something with even a slight resemblance to a reasonable quitting time. I would rush home—home to him—and we would have our playtime, with the toy animals and the books, and then a comical dinner and a ridiculous bath, and then he would go to sleep, fighting it all the way. Then it would be morning and we would once again go through the mundane tragedy of parting.

Until one day it hit me.

"Don't we look like a pair of fine young gentlemen?"

"You asked me that once before, about two months ago."

"Did I? I don't seem to remember."

"What the hell is that?"

My wife was seeing, for the first time, the miniature jacket, white shirt, and necktie, and the miniature khaki pants on the bed.

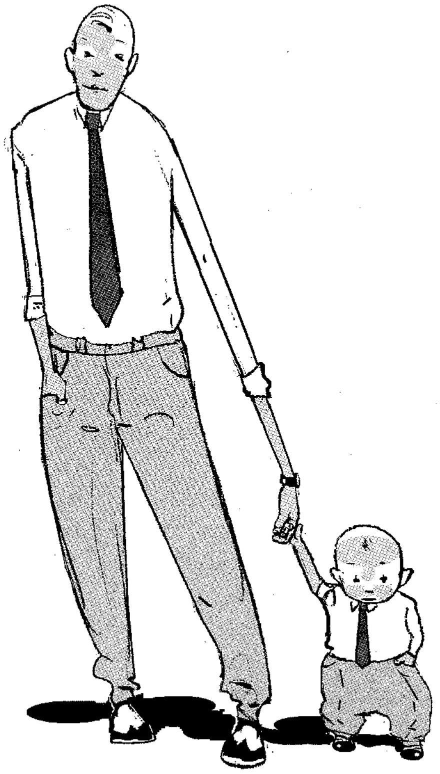
"It's what I call appropriate business attire."

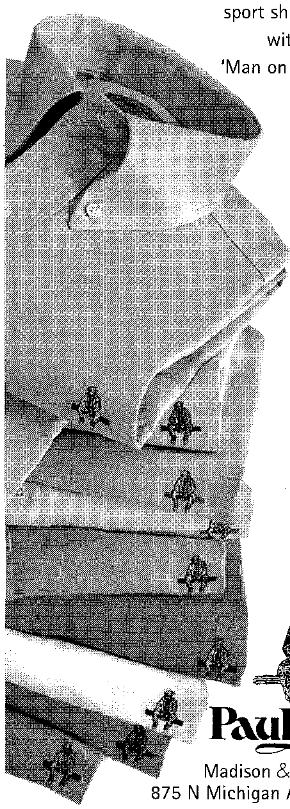
"Whatever."

She was late for work and her mind was obviously scrambled. My wife had the same life I had—pinging back and forth, like a Superball, between home and work, and work and home, with little detours into the land of sleep. She kissed us both and left.

After a ten-minute chase around the apartment, I captured Billy and dressed him in the business attire. The diaper made the khakis pooch out a little, but it wasn't something you noticed unless you were really looking for it. I even brushed his hair—oh, he didn't like that. In the necktie and the crisp shirt, he looked mature and capable. When the babysitter arrived, I sent her home. My associate and I had to get to work.

At the newsstand, I paid an extra fifty cents for a second copy of the *Daily News*. On the subway, I found two seats together. I opened his *News*





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to the comics, mine to the sports, and we read happily for the whole ride. At least I did. He must have come across something he didn't like—perhaps an especially annoying "Family Circus," or a "One Big Happy" that wasn't up to par—and he flung his newspaper to the floor, where it got stepped on by our fellow-riders.

Soon enough, we were there—at the office.

It's funny how things that are perfectly natural in the old slapstick movie shorts can seem so inappropriate in real life. For instance, I thought my new associate should sit in the cubicle next to mine, and so I made a playful attempt to take the colleague seated there—a young woman named Marisa—by the back of her collar and the hem of her skirt. I thought it would be easy enough to toss her out. But no. She fought and told me to get my hands off of her. (I think her exact words were "Get your hands off of me!")

Billy would have to work in close quarters with me for the time being. But he looked fine, sitting atop my filing cabinet, and he stayed relatively quiet, even when the manager of my division stopped by to give me a little talking-to about my recent "job performance." As I was being chided, I gave Billy a wink to let him know his old man was still the champ.

"Things will be different now," I said. "Now that I've got my associate with me, I'll get more done. A lot more."

"Let's hope so," the guy said. As he droned on about how I might improve, my young associate provided us with something that perfectly summed up how I was feeling: he pooped in his pants.

I pushed aside the computer terminal and laid Billy out on the desk. There was a lot of screaming, as usual, on both our parts, as I changed his diaper. (Would you like to suffer that indignity, either as the changer or the one being changed?) When I said, "Can you hold this?" to a nearby colleague as I was coming down the homestretch, the man looked at me as if I were insane, and said bitterly, "You've got to be kidding."

At coffee-break time, Billy made a nice addition to our little klatsch.

ISTVAN BANYAI

"I like your tie," said Ginny, an office hottie from research.

Billy didn't respond to this conversational gambit.

She tried again: "How old are you, little guy?"

He knows his age but doesn't divulge it on command.

"He's just out of school," I said.

"Is that a fact?"

Billy tossed a piece of doughnut. I think it might have hit Ginny in the face. Some guy who was sitting in the corner, half asleep, started cackling.

Ginny left the room, saying, "Cute kid."

I looked over at Billy.

"She thinks you're cute. Try not to let it go to your head."

The next day, we had an amusing episode. Seated on my desk, Billy was doing some work, using white paper and a few old crayons, when Lydia came by with a paycheck.

"Is this it?" I asked.

"Is what it?"

"Just one paycheck?"

"Afraid so."

"There are two of us, you might have noticed."

"Oh, yeah. Next week we'll have two paychecks, one for you and one for this guy here. What's your name? That's right, I'm talking to you."

Billy was concentrating.

"He's got a project," I said, trying to explain away my associate's rudeness. "These deadlines can be murder."

"I can see that."

"Dad," Billy said, "I want a white crayon."

"I don't have a white crayon. All there is is what's here. Anyway, it wouldn't show up on the paper, even if we did have one."

"We have one?"

"I said we don't have one."

"White crayon!"

"Look, Billy, it's just not going to happen."

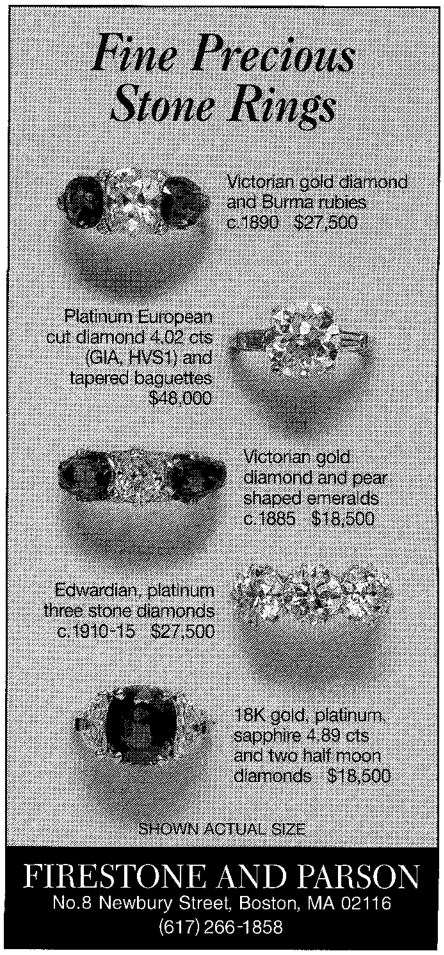
The screams were incredible.

"I hate for you to hear this, Lydia," I said. "He gets emotional sometimes—but his iron will pays off for us in other ways."

"What?"

"I said—"

It was no use. She was never go-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ing to hear me over the din of his disappointment.

Lydia left in a hurry. I felt myself sweating as I ransacked my desk for a white crayon that was not there. Billy kept right on screaming, as if cheering me on in my crazed, futile search.

The head man made a rare appearance in my cubicle area a day later.

"You're aware, aren't you, that the corporation provides emergency child care for those employees who need it."

"Yes, but what does that have to do with me?" I noticed that he was staring hard at Billy. "I trust you've met my associate, Billy Connors."

"Well, I've heard about him."

Billy was banging something against the filing cabinet. It was not the kind of thing you usually heard on our floor—there was an abrasive quality to it—but it had a nice rhythm.

"Is it true that you tried to throw Marisa out of her cubicle the other morning?"

"Oh, that," I said, laughing a little. "I sort of tried to give her the old Three Stooges heave-ho and she took it the wrong way. Silly thing that happened."

Billy was still banging away. Sounded pretty sweet. Little syncopation there.

"Well, what can he do?"

"What can he do? As you can see—or hear, rather—he's not bad at banging. He has some computer skills. And he livens up the coffee room, I can tell you that!"

"I hear he throws things at people."

"I won't deny it. He's unorthodox. But I know how you like people who think out of the box."

"Hmm."

Bosses are suspicious creatures. They want to take credit for a thing only after it's clear that it works. When something is new, when its kinks are still getting worked out, they're careful not to say a word one way or the other. So I believed there was still a chance that he might come to see this baby-faced young man as a strong addition to the team. Billy was rough, to be sure, but with a little polishing he could really shine.

But, just half an hour later, my hopes were dashed somewhat when the head man sent for us. In his big office, we had a talk, as Billy examined the paperweights on his desk.

"Let me get right down to it," my boss said. "Either use the child-care facility or else you're going to have to make a hard decision about whether or not you want to continue working here."

"What are you saying, exactly?"

He gave me a funny look, then said, "Why don't you take the day off tomorrow and ruminate about all this?"

"You, uh, think this ruminating might help matters?"

"I don't think it could hurt any."

"Good. Is there anything else?"

"I think that just about covers it."

"O.K. Say goodbye to the nice man, Billy."

"No!"

I tried my best to get him to say goodbye, but Billy couldn't bring himself to participate in this polite corporate chitchat, which masked the real possibility of one or both of us getting shit-canned.

Is two too young to drink a beer? I don't think so. Kids in France are drunk off their asses all the time, and they are certainly not under the stress that Billy was under.

We had been ruminating all day long, only to decide that I should go back to work, solo. What else could we do? I reassured Billy by telling him that the tables would be turned one day. That is, before we knew it, he would be the one entangled in the work world and I would be the one in need of special care and attention.

So there we were, sharing a Beck's as night was falling, and playing with the toy animals. I was the lion, Billy was the lemur. It was a battle. But, you know, he shouldn't have expected a lemur to have much of a chance against the king of the jungle. I tried to explain this to Billy, but in his beery anger he didn't want to hear it. In fact, he went to his room and slammed the door. It was the first time he had ever done that. It was also the first time I hadn't let him win at one of our games. Maybe it was time for both of us to face reality. ♦

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OUR FAR-FLUNG CORRESPONDENTS

THE GHOST BIRD

Is America's largest woodpecker extinct, or only hiding?

BY JONATHAN ROSEN

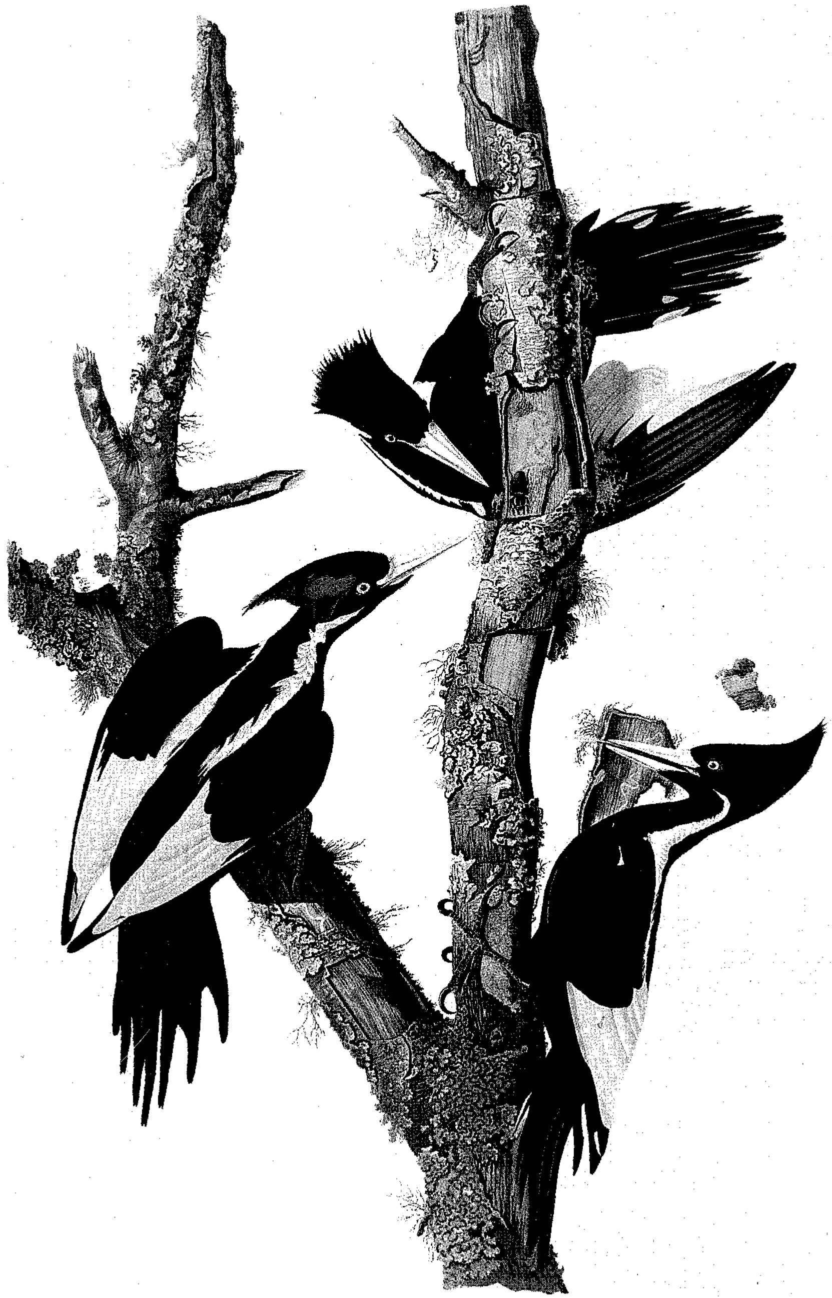
As a rule, I tend to avoid activities that require snakeproof boots. But when I read about a possible sighting of an ivory-billed woodpecker, I knew that I would be going down to the Louisiana swamp where the bird was reportedly seen. Though I am an avid bird-watcher, I am not a diehard "lister," the sort of person who rushes off, binoculars in hand, whenever a rare bird is spotted. (The British call such people "twitchers," as if bird-watching were a disease of the central nervous system.) Nevertheless, news of this sighting did make me jump, because the ivory-billed woodpecker isn't a rare bird—it is extinct.

Or so say the many experts who have been pronouncing the bird gone for the past fifty years. The American Bird Conservancy's field guide "All the Birds of North America" lists the ivorybill, along with the passenger pigeon, the great auk, and the Carolina parakeet, in its "Extinct Birds" section. There is no entry for the bird at all in the recently published "Sibley Guide to Birds" or in Kenn Kaufman's new "Birds of North America." My National Geographic guide refers to the bird's "probable extinction," and my Peterson guidebook dutifully describes the bird but then adds, cagily, "very close to extinction, if, indeed, it still exists."

Extinction. It is the death not merely of an individual but of all the individuals—past, present, and potential—that make up a species. Once gone, there is no retrieval. This, despite the fact that there are photographs of the ivorybill, recordings of its voice, and even a silent movie of its nesting habits, which was made in the nineteen-thirties, when the bird was studied in one of its last redoubts—an area of old-growth forest in Louisiana that, notwithstanding a fight waged by conservationists, was ultimately felled for timber.

The possibility that any bird said to be extinct might still be around is exhilarating, but the ivorybill, in particular, has what environmentalists refer to as "charisma," a sort of magical personality that has affected bird-watchers since they first noticed the bird. For one thing, the ivorybill is—or was—very big. At twenty inches, it was America's largest woodpecker and the biggest woodpecker in the world after the now (presumably) extinct imperial woodpecker, which lived in Mexico, and whose chances for rediscovery are even slimmer than the ivorybill's.

The ivorybill also has a reputation for indomitable defiance, and that spirit may have doomed it. Its habitat was exclusively old-growth forest—trees that had lived for hundreds of years—and it simply could not withstand the encroachments of man. In "Hope Is the Thing with Feathers," a haunting study of extinct American birds, published last



After Audubon painted the ivorybill, he called it nature's answer to Van Dyck.

JOHN JAMES AUDUBON/AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY LIBRARY

year, Christopher Cokinos quotes a description of an ivorybill that was written in the eighteenth century by Alexander Wilson, an early, great American ornithologist.

When Wilson shot and captured his ivorybill, in Wilmington, North Carolina, the wounded bird began to shriek in a way "exactly resembling the violent crying of a young child"—a sound so frightening to Wilson's horse "as nearly to have cost me my life." Wilson stowed the bird in his carriage, under cover, and drove to an inn, where he asked for a room "for myself and my baby." He left the bird alone in his room for less than an hour, and when he returned he discovered that it had hammered its way through the wall nearly to freedom:

> The bed was covered with large pieces of plaster; the lath was exposed for at least fifteen inches square, and a hole, large enough to admit a fist, opened to the weather-boards; so that, in less than another hour, he would certainly have succeeded in making his way through.

Wilson then tied the bird to a table and left again to find it some food. When he returned, he discovered that it had "almost entirely ruined the mahogany table to which he was fastened, and on which he had wreaked his whole vengeance." While Wilson was drawing the bird, it managed to attack and cut him in several places. "On the whole," Wilson wrote, the bird "displayed such a noble and unconquerable spirit, that I was frequently tempted to restore him to his native woods." Wilson resisted the temptation, and watched "with regret" as the bird, which refused all food, died after three days of captivity.

Wilson's remarkable memoir encapsulates all the strangeness of the human relationship to nature. A man shoots a bird, pretends it is his child, ties it to a table leg, and then laments its death. It is no wonder the passage inspired the composer Lee Hyla, just last year, to turn the story into "Wilson's Ivory-bill," a piece for baritone, piano, and the voice of an ivorybill, taken from a 1935 field recording of the bird. The composition conveys, with increasing anguish, the naturalist's ambivalence and his captive's defiance.

The ivorybill was not only tough; it was gorgeous—boldly patterned in black and white, with an ivory-white bill that measured three inches from base to tip. The male had a brilliant, blood-red crest. One of the bird's nicknames, the Lord God bird, apparently refers to the fact that people who saw it were so impressed that they cried out, "Lord God!"

John James Audubon, who was a far more gifted painter than Wilson, saw the ivorybill as somehow already existing in the realm of fine art. In his "Ornithological Biography," Audubon wrote:

> I have always imagined, that in the plumage of the beautiful Ivory-billed Woodpecker, there is something very closely allied to the style of colouring of the great Vandyke. The broad extent of its dark glossy body and tail, the large and well-defined white markings of its wings, neck, and bill, relieved by the rich carmine of the pendent crest of the male, and the brilliant yellow of its eye, have never failed to remind me of some of the boldest and noblest productions of that inimitable artist's pencil.

Audubon, who was born in 1785, died in 1851, before the frontier had been closed and when there were still American birds that had not been named. Today, it requires imagination *not* to see the ivorybill as a painting, since artistic representations of it are virtually all we have. The bird's scientific name does more than Audubon's poetic description to put the ivorybill back into nature—*Campephilus principalis*, or "the principal eater of grubs."

There has always been an impulse to make symbols of birds. "Hail to thee, blithe Spirit! / Bird thou never wert—" Shelley sang to his skylark. The ivorybill has become an emblem of the now vanished American wilderness. The white bill of the bird was used in trade by Native Americans, and it has been discovered in their graves—as currency, perhaps, for the world to come. Ivory-billed woodpeckers continue to have an almost totemic force for birders today.

It is easy to see why birds, which mediate between earth and sky, are the repository of high poetic hopes. But it is precisely because birds aren't spirits that they are so compelling to look at. For me, the thrill of bird-watching is catching the glint of an alien consciousness—the uninflected, murderous eye, the aura of reptilian toughness under the beautiful, soft feathers, the knowledge that if I were the size of a sparrow, and a sparrow were as big as I am, it might rip my head off without a second's hesitation.

Ideally, bird-watching gives you both the symbol and the living bird: a Van Dyck painting that eats grubs. You bring along a guidebook, an artifact of the literary world, even as you wander out into nature in pursuit of something wild. You experience the thrill of seeing an untamed creature, but immediately you

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gut stretched between
the beginning and the end
what would the music
be without you
since even through
the chorus of pure joy
the tears hear you
and nothing can restrain them

—*W. S. Merwin*

cage it in its common or scientific name and link the bird—and yourself—to a Linnaean system of nomenclature that harks back to the Enlightenment notion that nature can be ordered. And behind Linnaeus lurks the Biblical belief that, like Adam and Eve, we have always named animals: it is our job. Looking for an ivorybill today takes the mediating nature of bird-watching to an even higher level, because the quarry is a kind of ghost bird, a creature that does and does not exist.

In the spring of 1999, David Kulivan, a twenty-one-year-old forestry student at Louisiana State University, in Baton Rouge, was out turkey hunting in the Pearl River Wildlife Management Area, in southeastern Louisiana. He was alone, it was early morning, and he was wearing camouflage pants, shirt, and cap. He was sitting with his back against a tree, holding his twelve-gauge shotgun and waiting for a turkey to gobble, when a pair of very large birds settled about twenty yards from him.

Although he was not a bird-watcher, Kulivan knew that he had never seen these birds before. They were larger than pileated woodpeckers, which are, after the ivorybill, America's largest woodpecker. These birds were black and white, like pileated woodpeckers, but they had more white on the wing and their bills were bigger and whiter. One of the birds had a red crest; the other had a black crest. They flew to a water oak about ten yards from where Kulivan was sitting. He got a very good look. He had brought a camera with him, in the hope of recording the turkey he planned to shoot, but it was zipped into his vest, and he decided that it was better to study the birds as carefully as possible than to risk taking his eye off them. The bird with the red crest, which Kulivan concluded was the male of the pair, began to call. Kulivan later described the sound as a "loud, nasal kent." A few minutes later, the birds flew off, but Kulivan continued to hear the call for another fifteen minutes. He abandoned his turkey hunt and spent the rest of the day chasing the birds through the woods, but he never got another decent look at them.

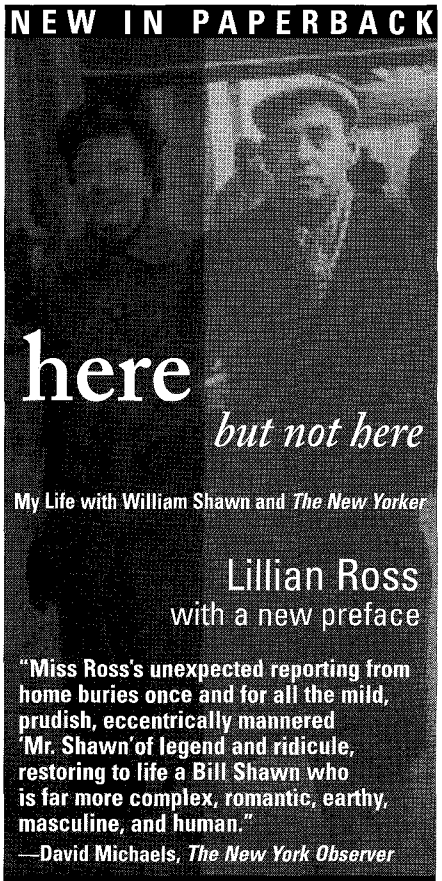
Unfortunately, only a photograph would have given Kulivan's sighting authority. Moreover, it was April Fools' Day—not an auspicious time to announce the appearance of an extinct bird. For several days, Kulivan told nobody about the birds. But the following Monday he went to see Vernon Wright, his wildlife professor.

Wright was already a believer in the possible existence of ivory-billed woodpeckers. He had been hearing reports of sightings for years, and although he had never seen the bird himself, he suspected that it was out there. Wright had told his class about the ivorybill, along with several rare animal species that were still rumored to live in the swamps and forests of Louisiana.

The paradox of birding is that unless you learn about a bird beforehand you're unlikely to see it in the field, but until you see it in the field you can never really know what it looks like. This is a tension overcome by experience—unless you're looking for an extinct bird. By eliminating the ivorybill from guidebooks, ornithologists are reducing the chances that ordinary observers might accurately identify the bird, should it in fact exist. Wright, in telling his students about the bird, was, in some sense, deputizing them for a hunt, but he may also have been setting them up for a mirage.

Wright passed word of Kulivan's sighting on to James V. Remsen, an ornithologist at Louisiana State and the curator of birds at the university's museum. Although his expertise is in South American birds, Remsen had been fielding ivorybill reports for years, and he knew a great deal about the woodpeckers and their habits. Remsen grilled Kulivan about his sighting. Kulivan had noticed details that do not appear in guidebooks—for instance, the way the crest of the female curled forward. "It was," Remsen later told me, "the most credible report I've heard in twenty years on the job."

Remsen helped persuade the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries to halt logging in the Pearl River Wildlife Management Area. That winter, when the leaves had fallen off the trees and the snakes were sluggish, several teams composed of members of Wildlife and Fisheries, as well as of local and visiting birders, searched the area. They found nothing conclusive, but not seeing a bird is almost never proof that



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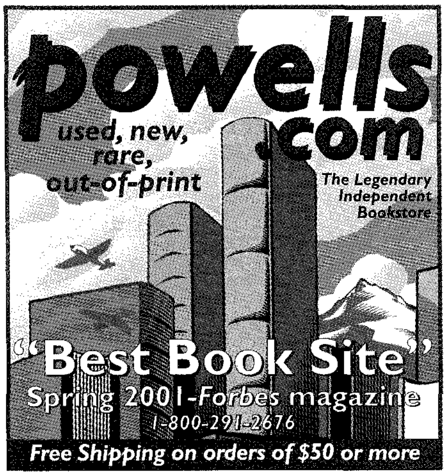
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it isn't out there. Kulivan became obsessed with finding the ivorybill. He continued to search for it during the summer, when the temperature exceeded a hundred degrees, the leaves on the cypresses and sweet gums reduced visibility, and snakes and mosquitoes had reclaimed the swamp.

Last October, a year and a half after Kulivan's original sighting, I, too, went down to the Pearl River Wildlife Management Area to search for the bird. Logging was still suspended in the region, but hunting continued unabated. It was almost disappointing that the place was so easy to get to. Leaving from New Orleans, I drove northeast for forty minutes, picked up I-59 near the Mississippi border, and headed north for a few minutes more. I turned off at the "swamp exit," and suddenly I was there.

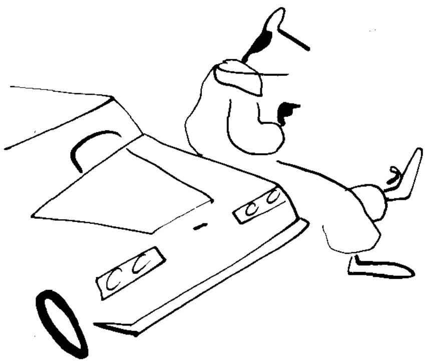
I arrived a few days before the start of squirrel season. There is also a season for deer, feral hog, rabbit, raccoon, opossum, turkey, and woodcock. Trapping is permitted for mink, bobcat, raccoon, beaver, and something called a nutria, which sounds like a vitamin supplement but is, in fact, a large aquatic rodent. I soon realized that "wildlife management" basically means maintaining the area to facilitate hunting.

Bow hunting—for deer—was already under way, and Bill Vermillion, my guide from the Wildlife and Fisheries Department, handed me a bright-orange hunting vest and a cap that read "Support National Hunting and Fishing Day." He said slyly, "That hat'll be popular in Central Park." But I was fully aware of the historical link between hunting and birding. Most of the great American naturalists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were hunters, and Audubon's diary can read like a catalogue of murdered birds. Killing specimens was a necessity—there was no other way to get close to the birds in order to draw them—and I cannot deny feeling a hunter's urge whenever I lift my binoculars. At the moment, I wished that I were a hunter, if only to have better gear. I had neglected to purchase snakeproof boots, and I was worried about water moccasins—highly venomous snakes locally referred to as "cottonmouths." I was wearing only ankle-high hiking boots. I mentioned my anxiety to my guide. Bill had the quiet, watchful intelligence of someone who spends part of each day alone in the woods. His boots came up to his knees. "I'd give a look down for every look you take up," he said.

Bill's attitude toward the ivorybill seemed to be one of agnostic optimism. We had both brought along cameras, just in case. "Every time I don't see the bird, it takes the wind out of me," he said before we set out.

The sound of the highway followed us into the woods. At various times, I could hear the reports of rifles from a shooting range operated by Wildlife and Fisheries, and the churning of trucks from nearby gravel pits. Still, once I was inside the preserve, it was easy to feel very far away indeed; were it not for a drought, much of the region would have been impassable without a boat. The black, reflective waters of various bayous cut through the woods. The smooth-barked cypress trees had swollen at the base, forming a natural buttress against floodwater. Surrounding them, like a brood of children, were cypress "knees," knobby protuberances between one and three feet high that helped the trees "breathe" underwater and kept them anchored in the shifting, sodden soil. Dry earth and rotting stumps had been plowed up in patches by the snouts of wild hogs. The slow-burn smell of decaying woods was everywhere.

For the next six hours, we tramped through scraggly underbrush, cane, and blackberry brambles. I was looking down for snakes and up for birds. I also kept an eye out for the enormous webs of banana spiders, which stretch several yards from tree to tree. Bill, who walked ahead of me, cleared the webs out of the way as though he were unlatching and opening a gate. The spiders, which were



several inches long and black with yellow underbellies, occasionally ended up riding on his back. I flicked them off with a stick.

There were clouds of mosquitoes, and we had both doused ourselves with Cutter insect repellent. I remembered something I had learned about certain tribespeople in Indonesia, who decided that, rather than feel assaulted by the forest parasites, it was more sensible to "share" their blood with them. I quickly abandoned this philosophy and applied more Cutter. The presence of so many mosquitoes, even as fall was approaching and the days were growing short, suggested that there was something unusually fertile, almost primordial, about the place. An armadillo ran across our path, dressed for the Jurassic period.

What with the mosquitoes, my fear of snakes, the physical exertion of walking through pathless woods, and my efforts not to scream whenever I felt the velvety slap of a spiderweb on my face, I was not a particularly effective searcher. Still, our hopes were buoyed by the presence of many birds in the upper canopy of the trees. We heard red-bellied woodpeckers, white-eyed vireos, and indigo buntings.

We covered only a tiny fragment of the thirty-five thousand acres of the preserve. Bill had a global-positioning system set for one especially large tree of the sort favored by ivorybills, but the signal kept bouncing off the surrounding trees, making his readings inaccurate. Despite the G.P.S., we lost our way several times, but Bill also had a compass and a topographical map, and eventually we blundered back to familiar ground. We never did find the giant tree.

Big trees play an important role in the life of ivorybills. The ornithologist James T. Tanner, who, between 1937 and 1939, studied the last significant population of the birds, noted that they fed on the grubs that attacked recently dead trees. The birds scaled off the bark with their massive bills to get to the bugs beneath. To enjoy a steady supply of dying trees, they required the sort of old-growth forests in which trees are mature enough to die on a regular basis, and an area warm and moist enough to promote rapid decay. The bottomlands of the Mississippi Delta were ideal, as were parts of East Texas and the Florida Panhandle. The birds in Tanner's study lived in a region of Louisiana that is known today as the Tensas River National Wildlife Refuge. Tanner referred to the area as the Singer Tract, because it was then owned by the Singer Sewing Machine Company, which, despite protests, sold its logging rights to a Chicago lumber company that began levelling the forest in 1938.

The ivorybill's feeding requirements are a perfect example of specialization; its restricted habitat eliminates the competition of other birds. The price a species pays for specializing, though, is vulnerability to changes in the environment. For example, the Kirtland's warbler, which breeds exclusively in a few counties of Michigan, requires young jack pine trees with interconnected lower branches. Such finicky behavior has nearly cost the warbler its life. Fewer forest fires over the years have meant that fewer young pine trees sprout up, and the bird has been kept alive only by the efforts of environmentalists to plant new trees. But it is easier to plant new trees than to conjure up old ones. The fate of the ivorybill may have been sealed some fifty years ago, when the last stands of virgin forest were logged out of existence in the Deep South.

According to Christopher Cokinos, in "Hope Is the Thing with Feathers," one of the last official observers of an ivory-billed woodpecker was the Audubon Society's Richard Pough, who, in 1943, went to the Singer Tract while it was being logged. After much searching, Pough found the lone female of the species that had been reported to still be in the area. She was sitting near her roosting tree and, despite the encroachment of loggers, refused to fly away. From Pough's description, one gets the feeling that the bird was simply awaiting its doom. In his report to the Audubon Society, Pough conjectured that there may have been "psychological" factors involved. Like the bird that Alexander Wilson had captured, it appeared willing to die rather than compromise.

This tragic, romantic view of the bird may be misleading. There are ornithologists, like Remsen at Louisiana State, who speculate that ivorybills can live in recently dead trees that are only a hun-

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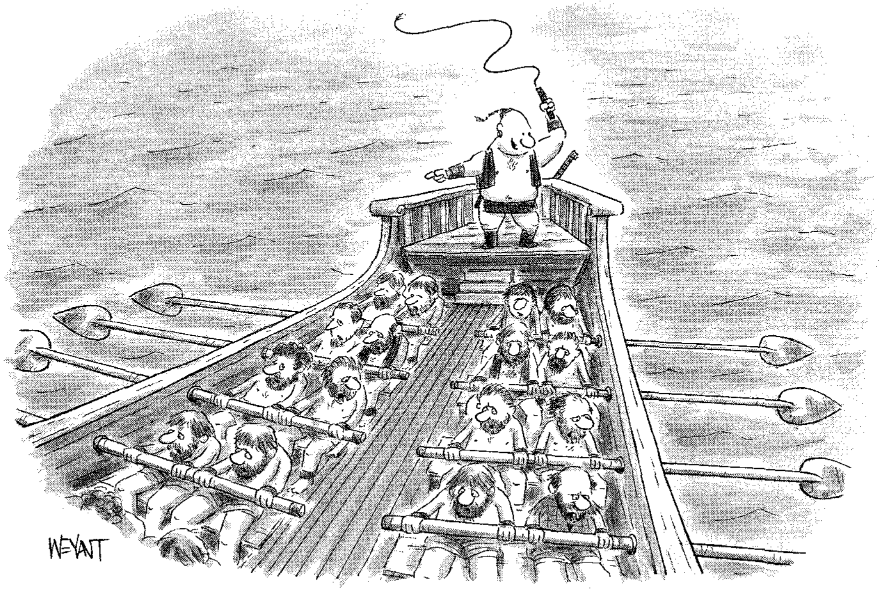

"Excellent. Now just the altos."

• •

dred years old—instead of the virgin timber they have been known to favor. If that is true, there are areas where logging stopped some fifty or sixty years ago which are once again producing trees that are congenial to the ivorybill's habits. There are also areas, like the Pearl, where, because of their frequent inaccessibility, enough large trees may have been left uncut to give the birds a place to roost and breed—provided, of course, that they are still around.

The question divides ornithologists, naturalists, and bird-watchers. It is notoriously difficult to prove the absence of something. The birds may have a life span of twenty years, and even the most pessimistic ornithologists concede that a few renegades could have dodged detection, like those Japanese soldiers hidden in the jungle who didn't hear the order to surrender after the Second World War.

It is also possible that the birds were more adaptable than anyone imagined, and that they are quietly reproducing in remote regions. It has been only fifty years since the last authenticated sighting, and there have been numerous unauthenticated ones, many delivered years after the bird was seen, by locals who may have been afraid that their land would be confiscated by the government if an endangered bird was discovered nesting there. Remsen told me that he has been shown credible photographs from the nineteen-seventies of nesting ivorybills by a man who believed that he would lose his land if their presence was made known. (More than once I heard a local adage: "There's no such thing as an endangered species on private property.") As for why bird-watchers never seem to be the ones to report ivorybill sightings, it is often observed that birders, unlike hunters—and birds—do not stray far from marked paths.

During our six-hour trek, my vague longing to see an ivorybill turned into a powerful ache. Just when I had begun to lose hope, a noisy shadow stirred above me—a large, slow black flapping—and my heart beat faster. I tried to remember where I had put my camera, and I wondered whether Bill could reach his in time. I thought of Mary Scott, a fine nature photographer who maintains an ivorybill Web site (www.birdingamerica.com). She had gone down to the Pearl with the wave of searchers the winter after Kulivan's sighting, and she later reported that she may have seen one of the birds but was so moved by the experience that her eyes filled with tears and she flubbed the photo.

When my bird landed in better light, I realized that what I had just seen and heard was not the Lord God bird but a beautiful pileated woodpecker. And yet, after having had a sense of that large bird launching itself from a branch, I felt certain that the ivorybill was out there waiting for me.

Two days later, I was in the swamp again, this time with David Kulivan, his wildlife professor, Vernon Wright, and an environmental-studies student and friend of Kulivan's named Chris Hurst. Kulivan was dressed in bluejeans, high boots, a camouflage shirt, and a vest like the one he had worn on the day of his sighting. A hunter since the age of fourteen, Kulivan told me that he spends his summers interning for the National Rifle Association, helping out on matters having to do with hunting and conservation. He had close-cropped blond hair and an air of casual confidence. Modest but firm in his claims, Kulivan said, "I would never risk becoming a pariah in my own chosen field." When I asked him if he viewed himself as someone who was mystically elected to see the birds, he would have none of it, referring to his sighting as only "a lagniappe," the Louisiana word for an unexpected gift. As Wright put it to me, "He's not a hot dog."

Vernon Wright is a bluff, middle-aged man with a white mustache and an encyclopedic knowledge of the fauna of Louisiana. I was impressed by his outdoorsman's energy and by the way he squirted Off! into his camouflage hat and then onto his hair, as if it were hair spray. He was wearing jeans and sneakers, and he was obviously not afraid of snakes. Wright asked me to shed my orange hunting hat, explaining that the whole point was not to be seen, to disappear into the woods.

We arrived in the Wildlife Management Area before first light. It was 5 A.M. and pitch dark. We did the first half hour of hiking by flashlight. We were looking for an old pig trap that Kulivan had been using as a landmark to help him find the spot where he had seen the birds. When we finally got there, Kulivan and Wright suggested that we split up and meet back at the trap in an hour. Worried that I might get lost, I attached myself to Wright, who headed into the swamp. After about five minutes, we reached a clearing where we could sit and wait.

We turned off our flashlights and spent half an hour simply listening, while the woods went from black to gray to green. At first, it was utterly silent; then, suddenly, there was life everywhere. The sounds reminded me of the stirrings my daughter makes in her crib before she is fully awake. Wright turned on a tape recorder that he had brought along in case we heard the double raps of the woodpecker's drumming or the loud, nasal notes of its call.

The day before, I had stopped by Louisiana State to meet with James Remsen, who showed me the ivorybills in the university's collection. A lively talker, Remsen had a great horned owl mounted above the door of his office—wings spread, talons bared. Like many ornithologists, he seemed at once bookish and outdoorsy. He slid open one of the specimen drawers, and there, folded like portable umbrellas, were the bodies of two ivorybills.

I picked up one. It was more than a foot and a half long, stiff and light. The feathers had the dry, oily softness that they might have had in life. The eerie realization that this might be the only time I would ever see an ivory-billed woodpecker was overwhelming. "It's a cosmic moment," Remsen said.

The bird that I examined had a tag tied to one clenched foot: it had been "collected" in Florida in 1899. Every detail was there—the frazzled, unkempt sweep of its red crest, the manner in which the black abruptly gave way to white, the full-moon lustre of its bill—except, of course, that the flight had gone out if it and it wasn't a bird anymore. Moved by a sudden impulse, I took out my camera and photographed the inert ivorybills. Now, as I sat in the clearing with Wright, I held the memory of those birds in my mind's eye.

Toward midday, Kulivan took us to the spot where he believed he had seen the woodpeckers. Later, we stopped to stare up at a spruce pine that may once have served as a roost for them. It was old enough and tall enough, and several large holes had been bored into its trunk, about forty feet from the ground. But the birds were not there.

Eight years ago, my wife and I spent two weeks in a rented house on a lake in New Hampshire. Our landlady had recently been widowed, and the house still showed remnants of the couple's life together. The man's parkas were still in the closet; his hunting caps were hanging on a hook; and, on a bookshelf, I found his name written inside a copy of Roger Tory Peterson's "Eastern Birds."

In the back of the book was a checklist of American birds in the Eastern region, and the man had ticked off the birds that he had seen. There was something affecting about my discovery of this list. I had no idea what the man had done for a living, but I knew that, in his spare time, he had seen a red-bellied woodpecker and an evening grosbeak, and that he had found it worthwhile to record his sightings. My first impulse that summer was to catch a glimpse of the birds he had not seen—to complete his list for him. My second impulse, a more powerful one, was to see the birds he had spotted. And, whenever I did, I felt a mysterious kinship.

Audubon, toward the end of his life, developed dementia. The birds he had so painstakingly documented began to fly out of his head. Extinction is like that desolation amplified, as if the earth itself could forget the animals that inhabit it. It is difficult to talk about the ivorybill without resorting to the language of longing: I've heard many birders routinely refer to the ivorybill as "the Grail."

The ivorybill has risen from the dead before. A nesting pair was found in Florida in 1924, at a time when naturalists considered the bird gone forever. The birds were shot and stuffed by hunters. In 1932, ivorybills turned up in the Okefenokee Swamp in Georgia. The birds studied by James Tanner in the Singer Tract were discovered in 1934. I have heard that the Atchafalaya region, a broad expanse of Louisiana swampland west of the Pearl, is considered a possible ivorybill habitat. There are also rumors that a few Cuban ivorybills, which are practically indistinguishable from their American cousins, may have survived the rapid deforestation of the island, and that Cuban ornithologists are keeping their whereabouts a secret.

My desire to find an ivorybill may in part be the hope of a birder to see something he has never seen before. But I know it is more than that. It is the dream of restoring to Audubon one of his beloved birds. Already, I am thinking about my next trip down to the swamp. ♦

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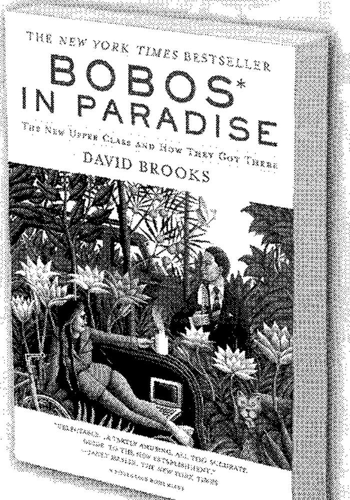
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ANNALS OF POLITICS

LOUIS FREEH'S LAST CASE

Last week, the F.B.I. chief announced his retirement. What—and who—hindered him in solving the crime he cared about most?

BY ELSA WALSH

On June 25, 1996, shortly before 10 P.M., three sentries posted on a rooftop at Khobar Towers, a high-rise compound that housed the two thousand American military personnel assigned to the King Abdul Aziz Airbase, in Saudi Arabia, noticed a tanker truck pull up to a perimeter fence. The area had been declared a likely target for a terrorist attack, and when the sentries saw two men jump out of the truck into a car and speed away they recognized the possibility of a bomb. They desperately tried to evacuate the building, pounding on the doors of sleeping airmen; four minutes later, the truck exploded, shearing off the face of Building 131. The explosion was so powerful that it left a crater eighty-five feet wide and thirty-five feet deep; the blast could be heard in Bahrain, some twenty miles away. Nineteen men were killed and about five hundred were injured. Greater casualties were avoided only because the bombers had put water in the tanker, forcing the blast downward.

Louis Freeh, the director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, was visiting relatives in New Jersey when he was told about the bombing, and he immediately dispatched a hundred and twenty-five agents and employees to Saudi Arabia. (Though the Saudis had primary legal authority, the F.B.I. is charged with investigating the deaths of Americans overseas.) Shortly after returning to Washington, Freeh and Robert (Bear) Bryant, then his national-security deputy, boarded an Air Force jet for the seventeen-hour flight to Saudi Arabia. It was unusual for F.B.I. directors to visit crime scenes, but Freeh had become a familiar sight to agents working on big cases. Since becoming director, in 1993, he was half-jokingly referred to as the Bureau's only Presidentially appointed case agent. Last week, when Freeh announced that he would retire in June, he pointed out that he had originally joined the Bureau at the age of twenty-five, fresh out of law school.

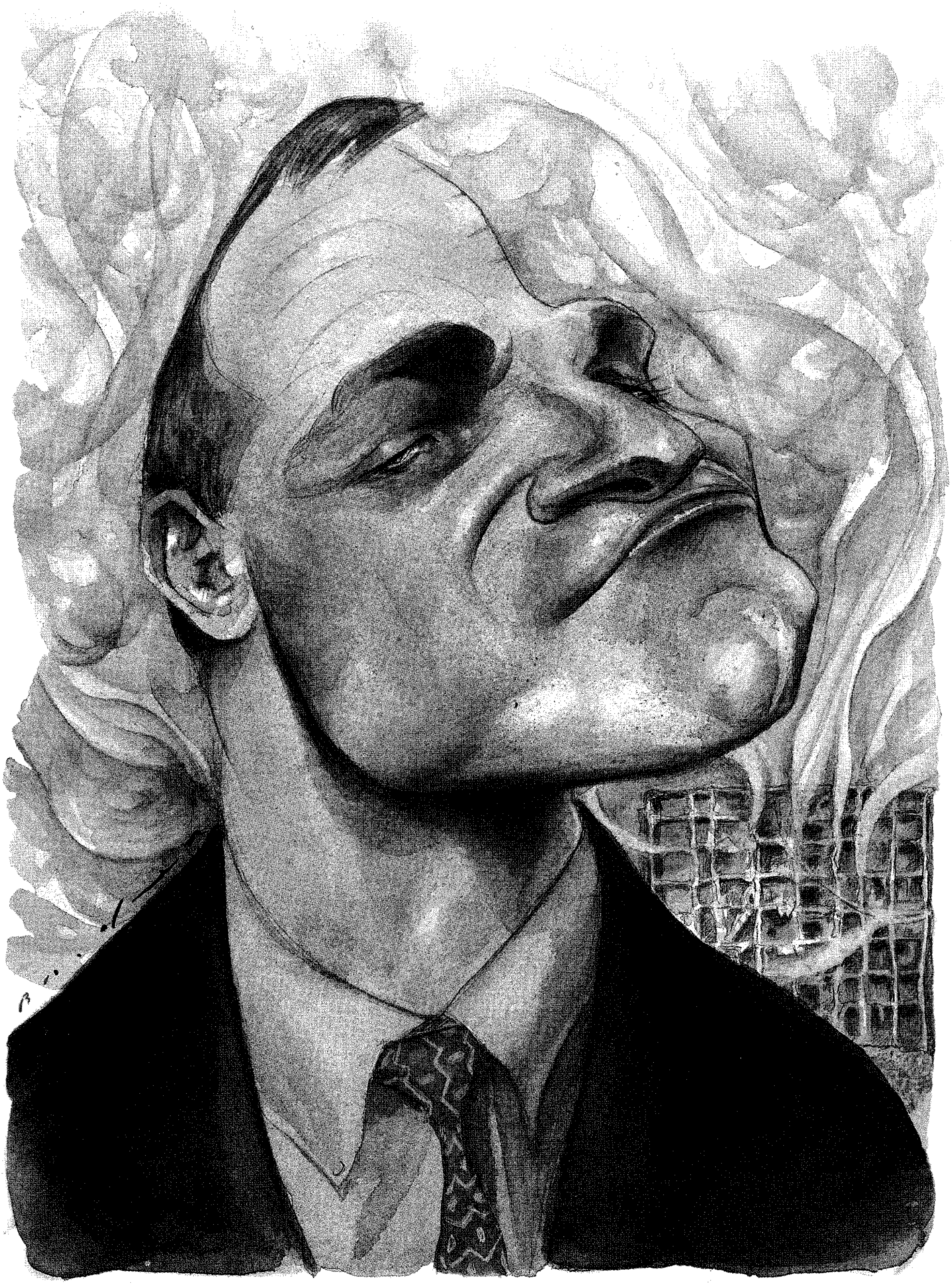
Freeh is a trim five feet nine inches tall. His suits are off-the-rack, and his dark, graying hair is typically shorn in a brush cut. He speaks softly, often dropping his "r"s; his manner is usually deferential. When he talks about the Khobar investigation, he tends to be terse, much like any policeman guarding his knowledge; but he does talk easily about what he saw at Building 131—how red paint and red chalk marked the spots where human remains were scattered, and how everywhere he looked there seemed to be people on crutches or with bandages on their heads and arms. When Freeh and Bryant arrived, both wearing suits, the temperature was about a hundred and twenty degrees; the Saudis had laid carpeting along the edge of the site so that people could watch the agents work. "You couldn't go to a crime scene like that, as an investigator or as an American, and not be determined to pursue the investigation," Freeh told me. In his pocket, Freeh, a Catholic, had been carrying the worn prayer book he received as an altar boy; it is something he always has with him. "I said many prayers during that trip—going, coming, during, and since then," he said.

Freeh noted in his retirement statement that during his tenure the Bureau has more than doubled its overseas presence—with new offices in cities from Moscow to Cairo. But the F.B.I. has had problems abroad, because most foreign police have never worked with the Bureau. The problems were especially acute with the Saudis, who had previously been reluctant to share evidence. Nearly a month before the bombing, the Saudis had beheaded several suspects who were being held in connection with the 1995 bombing of an American-run military compound in Riyadh—executing them before the F.B.I., despite entreaties, had had a chance to interview them. After the Khobar bombing, the Saudis quickly rounded up suspects, most of them Saudi Shiites.

But the Khobar operation looked too sophisticated to be the work of an isolated group of dissidents. Many of the Saudis in custody were affiliated with the Saudi Hezbollah, an offshoot of the Iranian-sponsored organization Hezbollah, based in Lebanon and thought to be responsible for terrorist acts. With F.B.I. help, the Saudis were able to identify the truck chassis used in the bombing and trace it to the purchaser, who acknowledged being part of a cell trained by members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard. Another piece of evidence had emerged months before the bombing, when an alert Saudi border agent noticed something suspicious about a car coming from Jordan—it was too close to the ground—and discovered that it was packed with explosives. The driver admitted that he was also part of the same loosely linked series of "cluster cells." After interrogating the driver, the Saudis picked up about a dozen other cell members, and over the next few months the men in custody described a broad plan, directed and funded by a top official in the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, to target sites in Saudi Arabia. "We were picking up information that there was a plot to eventually target U.S. facilities in key locations at various places, and this was just one piece of it," said William Esposito, who was then the deputy F.B.I. director. When the blast went off at Khobar Towers, the detainees provided additional names and information.

President Clinton had publicly promised to punish those involved, vowing "to make sure those responsible are brought to justice." Almost from the start, however, the F.B.I. team in Saudi Arabia complained about a lack of access to key Saudi evidence. In response, Freeh pushed the National Security Council and the State Department to impress upon the Saudis the importance of the investigation. Samuel R. (Sandy) Berger, who became the Clinton Administra-

STEVE BRODNER



"Freeh is a lovely human being," the Saudi Prince Bandar said. "But he is much more sophisticated and deadly than benign."

tion's national-security adviser, told me that Clinton wrote to King Fahd and met with Fahd's half brother, Crown Prince Abdullah, in New York, personally urging them to coöperate. The Secretaries of Defense and State, Berger added, made personal appeals to the Saudi hierarchy.

Over the next few months, Freeh travelled twice more to Saudi Arabia. "Louis would go over there and try to negotiate for them to show us the evidence," Esposito said. "And then, at the highest levels, they would agree to it. And then . . . it wouldn't happen, so Louis would have to make another trip." But Freeh also heard from his Saudi counterparts that there had been little followup to the Administration's statements; as a result, a mixed signal was being sent about the seriousness of United States resolve. Freeh came to believe that the Clinton Administration feared jeopardizing its strategic relationships in the Middle East by pressing too hard; in fact, by the end of the Clinton era, Freeh had become so mistrustful of Clinton that, although he believed that he had developed enough evidence to seek indictments against the masterminds behind the attack, not just the front-line suspects, he decided to wait for a new Administration. The matter is unusually sensitive, because any indictments are likely to name Iranian government officials, especially those with ties to Iranian intelligence, commonly believed to be the source of terrorist activities.

According to those who have worked closely with Freeh, the Khobar barracks bombing became a case into which he poured not only enormous investigative resources but also his soul. As I delved into his life, I kept hearing whispers about what one person called his almost "theological" pursuit of the bombing, and up until the announcement of his retirement it remained in many ways his most important case—and the one most hidden from public view. "With Khobar, you can see all of Louis's values right on his sleeve," George Tenet, the director of the C.I.A., told me. The secrecy surrounding the case has been such that Dale Watson, the F.B.I.'s chief of counter-terrorism, once said, "It's a killing offense around here to talk about it."

Freeh recently briefed President George W. Bush on the attack, and gave the Administration a list of people whom he thinks the United States should indict. The Administration's handling of the case may be one of its most important foreign-policy tests. "The only unfinished piece of business that I have is the one you're writing about," Freeh told me late last week.

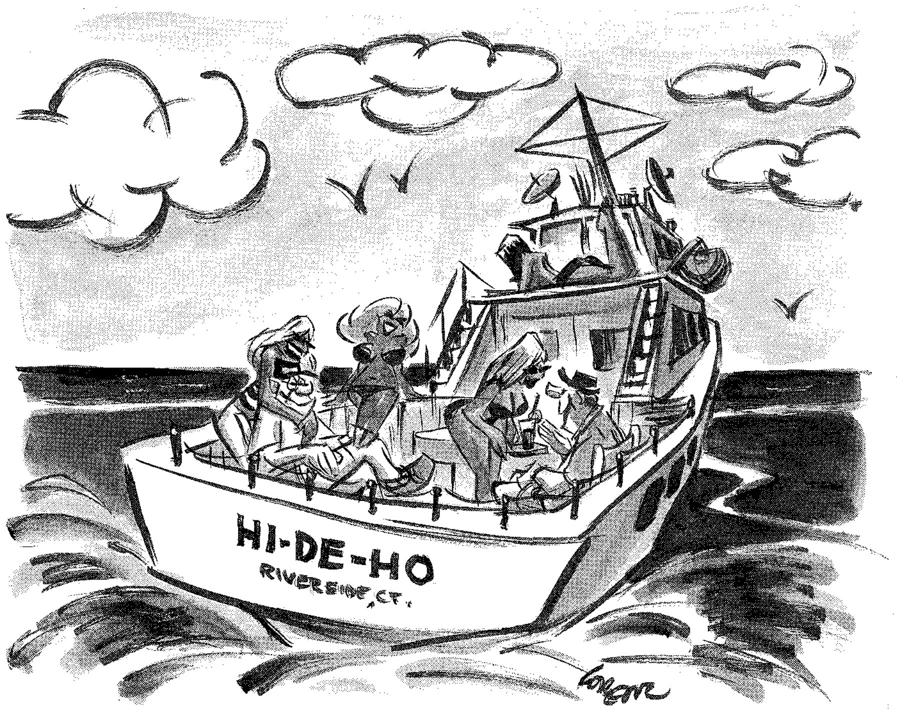
II

The F.B.I. director's office is on the seventh floor of the J. Edgar Hoover Building, on Pennsylvania Avenue, a few blocks from the White House. Bright-colored drawings and paintings made by Freeh's six children line almost the full length of one wall, and they are framed by photographs of some of Freeh's heroes: Giovanni Falcone, the Sicilian magistrate who was the Mafia's most fearless foe, and who was assassinated in 1992; U.S. District Court Judge Frank M. Johnson, Jr., whose mother's house was firebombed after Johnson ordered the desegregation of Southern public schools, and who swore Freeh in; and Elie Wiesel, the Holocaust survivor and Nobel Peace Prize winner. (Freeh once travelled to Auschwitz and Birkenau, against the wishes of the United States Ambassador to Poland, and delivered a speech about how the abuse of police power contributed to the Holocaust; last year he began requiring new agents to study the subject at the Holocaust Museum.)

By the time he leaves, at the end of June, Freeh, who is fifty-one, will have completed nearly eight years on the job. He has overseen the largest expansion of the F.B.I. in the agency's history, and assured its central role in national-security issues, very possibly becoming more powerful than J. Edgar Hoover. But there have been major embarrassments, most recently the discovery that Robert Hanssen, a longtime, trusted F.B.I. agent, had spied for the Soviet Union and Russia for fifteen years. The F.B.I.'s judgment was questioned after the Bureau fingered an Atlanta security guard, Richard Jewell, in connection with a bombing during the 1996 Summer Olympics; serious problems were uncovered in its once famed laboratory; and Freeh was active in pressing for the indictment of Wen Ho Lee, the Chinese scientist accused of mishandling nuclear secrets, in an investigation that a federal judge later said "embarrassed our entire nation." Freeh also had a number of public squabbles with the Clinton Administration, most notably over his pursuit of an independent counsel to investigate possible fund-raising abuses in the 1996 Presidential election. These conflicts demonstrated tenacity on Freeh's part but also a rigidity that troubled his critics, who regarded him as self-righteous and sanctimonious, unable to grasp the nuances of governing. Freeh has said that his battles with the Administration established a critical independence, but he was always aware of his power. "They are terrified of me," he once confided to an associate.

Over the course of a year, I talked with Freeh eight times—in his office, on the phone, in transit to New York, and during a trip to Italy, where he attended a memorial service for his friend Giovanni Falcone. I also spoke with his critics in the Administration and with his friends, including Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, who knew Freeh from his New York City days as a fabled F.B.I. agent, federal prosecutor, and federal judge. "I would describe Louis very quickly as the straightest guy I know," Giuliani said. Giuliani, an opera buff, said Freeh was a cross between Mario Cavaradossi, the painter and political idealist in "Tosca," and the warrior Radamès in "Aida." Giuliani went on, "Louis is a very sensitive guy, very, very decent. Very nice man. Very gentle. But about what he does he can be very determined and passionate."

Freeh was undoubtedly at his most determined in the Khobar barracks investigation. And in pursuit of the bombing case he became a skilled politician, enlisting allies in Washington and elsewhere. Freeh believes that personal relationships are a key to good investigative work, and says, "The statutory authorities and the resources and all the other factors are significant, but my experience is that none of them are as important as those relationships." When Freeh began to believe that the Clinton Administration wasn't fully committed to investigating the attack, he started to cultivate an outsider: Prince Bandar bin Sultan, the Saudi Ambassador to the United States and the nephew of King Fahd.



"Yes, sir, Ira, considering that you share eighty per cent of your genes with the common flatworm, you've done all right."

Prince Bandar has long been known in Washington as a bon vivant who lives extravagantly, hiring the likes of Roberta Flack for private entertainment, flying on his private jet to Dallas to watch a Cowboys game, or to Aspen. He is fifty-two years old and has been in Washington nearly twenty years; he seems to travel in a cloud of cigar smoke, walks with the swagger of a Saudi fighter pilot (which he was for seventeen years), and likes to engage in naughty gossip, laughing uproariously as he does so. Bandar sometimes joked that Freeh was "too hygienic." But Bandar, like Freeh, is skilled at cultivating people to get things done. Unlike other ambassadors, who exist on the ceremonial fringe, Bandar has real power. He was extremely close to President George H. W. Bush, and during the Reagan and Bush Administrations he was consulted regularly on foreign policy. In March, Bandar met privately with the younger Bush. "Happy days are here again," one of Bandar's close associates said of that meeting.

Freeh began to court Bandar shortly after the bombing, visiting him in his heavily guarded mansion in McLean, Virginia, or inviting him to his office, where Bandar was the only person allowed to smoke cigars. Bandar, for his part, loved the gamesmanship of Washington, and considered Bill Clinton his only equal at it. But he thought that President Clinton had not been well served by his foreign-policy team and in private he mocked what he saw as their view of the Saudis: " 'Just a bunch of ragheads who torture people to get a confession and then chop their heads off before anyone can check if what they said was true.' " Freeh, however, seemed respectful of Arab culture, and his foreign-policy views appeared closer to those of the Reagan and Bush Administrations. At first, Bandar wondered if Freeh's solicitude was merely a seduction ritual, but after several meetings he concluded that Freeh was as honestly determined as he appeared.

In a series of conversations in the first months after the bombing, Bandar and Rihab Massoud, his top aide on Khobar, discussed with Anthony Lake, the national-security adviser, and Sandy Berger, who was then his deputy, the implications of an Iranian connection. In retrospect, it is clear that the Saudis were far more certain of the Iranian role than they let on at the time, and that they were beginning what would become a drawn-out diplomatic game with the White House. Berger told me, "Bandar would always say, 'Tell me what you are going to do with the information if we share it with you.' I wouldn't play that game. I knew if we said we were going to whack the shit out of Iran we would never get anything from the Saudis—plus we had not made a decision about what we were going to do." Bandar, for his part, apparently feared that if he gave up hard evidence that led the United States to take military action against Iran, Iran would retaliate against its neighbor Saudi Arabia.

Bandar, ever the gamesman, tried a different tack with Freeh, pulling him aside during one of his early visits to Saudi Arabia. "Listen, we have the goods, God damn it. But I'll be honest with you. Politically, we don't want to pursue this. We don't want to be accused of pushing you to go to war." Freeh said that he was a policeman and his job was to gather the facts. The policymakers would make any decisions about the use of military force.

III

The Freehs live in a heavily mortgaged house in Great Falls, a Virginia suburb, and, although the F.B.I. director has access to a government plane, he often flies coach on a commercial airline. Freeh met Marilyn Coyle in 1980, at F.B.I. headquarters, where she was a paralegal in the Bureau's civil-rights division. (She was twenty-two; Freeh was thirty.) After a three-year courtship, they married, and a year later they had the first of six children, all boys, now ages three to sixteen. Freeh is actively involved in the daily routine of raising them, and nearly everyone I spoke to had a story about catching Freeh in the middle of diapering a baby or bathing a child. "I have always said to myself, 'I never want to say I'm leaving a job because I want to spend more time with my family,' " he said. "I feel sorry for people when they say that. But my advice to them is that you shouldn't have taken the job in the first place." More than once, when we spoke, he was on his way to or from the emergency room. Tenet, the C.I.A. director, said that five of Freeh's children were in Freeh's office on the day that Freeh swore Tenet in. "What I remembered most about the event was that one of the older kids was trying to stuff one of the younger ones into the safe," Tenet said. When it was reported that Freeh might retire at the end of last year, the reason most often cited was financial—the difficulty of supporting a large family on his salary, which is a hundred and forty-five thousand dollars. "What I've been telling people, including very close friends," he said to me last week, after he said he was quitting, "is that this was a good time for many different reasons, personal and professional." He conceded that he had not wanted to leave while Clinton was in office: "I wanted to make sure there was a smooth transition for the Bureau."

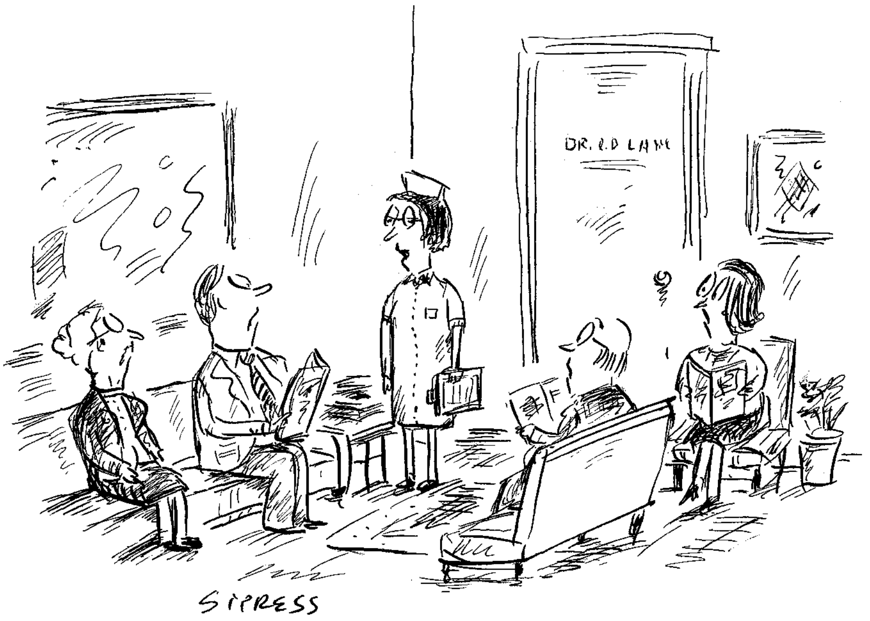
One day, Freeh told me about his first meeting with Clinton, in the summer of 1993. Freeh was a federal judge in New York. (He had been appointed by George H. W. Bush in 1991.) Bernard Nussbaum, Clinton's White House counsel, approached him about taking the post of F.B.I. director. Even though it was a job Freeh had dreamed about, he initially resisted, because Marilyn was reluctant to relocate. Clinton invited him to the White House and gave him a private tour. The President had seemed totally absorbed in what they were doing, and Freeh was impressed with the level and the detail of his historical knowledge. He seemed engaging and straightforward. At the end of the tour, Clinton asked Freeh if there was anything they needed to discuss. In two hours, they hardly touched on the F.B.I.

"He asked me what, if anything, I expected or wanted," Freeh said. "What I emphasized to him was that I wanted to make sure that the F.B.I. would be politically independent and have no political interference, and he agreed to that completely." The other issue that Freeh raised was his family. "I said, 'I'll be a full-time F.B.I. director for you, but I have four children and there will be times when that might take precedence over appearances and things like that.' He was fine about that. He was very supportive." Clinton had launched into a short speech about the importance of family, about attending to your wife and children. "He seemed very sincere," Freeh said.

But relations between Freeh and the Clinton White House soon deteriorated, beginning with Freeh's criticism of White House efforts to involve the F.B.I. in the Administration's decision, in 1993, to fire members of the travel staff, and his public objection to the Administration's proposed cuts in the F.B.I.'s 1995 budget. In 1996, Republicans in Congress were critical of the F.B.I.'s willingness to hand over hundreds of dossiers, including those of prominent Republicans, that the Administration, apparently through crossed signals, had requested in an effort to update its security files. The Filegate scandal struck at Freeh's most treasured principle: the independence of the Bureau. Freeh had joined the Bureau shortly after L. Patrick Gray, the acting director, acknowledged sharing information about the Watergate investigation with the White House counsel John Dean, and also destroying files. Freeh told me that the Watergate disgrace had informed every decision he made. One of the first steps he took after becoming director was to return his White House pass, with a note explaining that he would come to the White House strictly as a visitor, making him the only senior Clinton appointee without one. In his retirement statement, he quoted Harlan F. Stone, who was the Attorney General when the F.B.I. was founded, in 1924, on keeping the Bureau "completely divorced from the vagaries of political influence."

In the months after the Khobar barracks bombing, the break between Freeh and the White House became irreparable. By mid-February of 1997, as part of its investigation into possible fund-raising abuses by the Clinton-Gore campaign, the F.B.I. was reported to be looking into allegations that the Chinese government had tried to funnel money into the campaign. Clinton complained publicly about a lack of notification; he had no idea how deep skepticism about him had begun to run inside the F.B.I. During one late-night telephone conversation with Freeh and Esposito about a White House request to brief Secretary of State Madeleine Albright for an upcoming trip to China, Bear Bryant adamantly opposed sharing information that could be relayed to the President. "Why should we brief him?" he asked. "He's a crook. He's no better than a bank robber. Would we tell a bank robber about our investigation?" That's going a little too far, Freeh replied. At the end of the conversation, though, Freeh decided against sharing information.

Berger and James Steinberg, his deputy, found Freeh's position unacceptable. "Sandy and I both felt we could not do our jobs," Steinberg told me. Berger and Steinberg continued to complain, and eventually Freeh let the Bureau provide the National Security Council with a cleaned-up summary of the investigation. But the bad feelings only intensified. "You



"We're running a little behind, so I'd like each of you to ask yourself, 'Am I really that sick, or would I just be wasting the doctor's valuable time?' "

can't separate Khobar and Freeh from the context of his relationship with the White House. It went sour for a hundred different reasons," said one senior Pentagon official who worked closely with Freeh and the Administration. "Clinton's view was 'Freeh is trying to nail my ass every day.' "

When Attorney General Janet Reno rejected Freeh's advice to appoint an independent counsel, Freeh's recommendation was leaked to the press. A few days later, Mike McCurry, Clinton's press secretary, was asked if the President still had confidence in Freeh. "I think the President thinks that the F.B.I. is the world's greatest law-enforcement agency, and I think the President has great confidence that Louis Freeh is leading that agency—as best he can," he replied. Asked about Freeh, Clinton ignored the question. The controversy set off a discussion as to whether Freeh might quit, but Freeh told me that at that point he had not seriously considered quitting.

In March of 1997, the F.B.I. thought it had its first big break in the barracks bombing: Canadian authorities arrested the suspected lookout—Hani el-Sayegh, a Saudi Shiite implicated by others in Saudi custody. Several months earlier, Sayegh, who was then twenty-eight, had passed undetected through United States Customs at Logan Airport, in Boston, on his way to Canada. What happened to Sayegh over the next few months was in many ways emblematic of the case—delays and frustration, jurisdictional battles, increased suspicion among the F.B.I., the White House, and Cabinet agencies, and a tightening of the relationship between Freeh and the Saudis.

Freeh and the F.B.I. were eager to bring Sayegh to the United States for questioning—Sayegh, after all, might be the first human link to the attack. But almost immediately Justice Department lawyers raised objections. What if the case fell apart? What if Sayegh asked for asylum? The United States couldn't keep a suspected terrorist and certainly wouldn't want to let him walk free, but human-rights concerns might bar sending him back to Saudi Arabia, where they thought he might face torture and execution. Bandar and Massoud complained to Freeh that a Justice Department official seemed to be trying to encourage the Saudis to raise an objection to bringing Sayegh to Washington. When Freeh protested, Berger responded that he thought the Justice Department concerns seemed legitimate: if Sayegh reneged once he entered the United States, Berger pointed out, it would be an embarrassment to the Administration. But Berger also recalled telling Freeh, "If you think this strategy will work, we'll support it."

In early May, Eric Dubelier, an assistant U.S. attorney, and several F.B.I. agents travelled to Ottawa and began questioning Sayegh in the chapel of the Ottawa-Carleton Detention Center. A frail asthmatic with a shadowy beard, Sayegh nervously denied any role in the bombing, but acknowledged at one time having been a member of the cell alleged to be behind it and provided specific details about how he believed the other cell members might have carried it out. Sayegh also admitted that he had been recruited by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard and had been under the tutelage of Brigadier General Ahmad Sherifi, who was in charge of operations for the guard. He said he had participated in two operations directed by Sherifi, including videotaping another American airbase as a possible target. In all this, Sayegh confirmed the picture that the Saudis had painted: a Saudi Hezbollah faction responsible for the bombing appeared to be backed by Iran, and there were plans to target other sites. Convinced that Sayegh, at the very least, knew more than he was telling, the F.B.I. hoped to get him to plead guilty to charges related to the other Sherifi-directed operations: conspiracy to commit murder and international terrorism.

By the middle of June, Sayegh had reached a series of still secret agreements with the Justice Department. In exchange for pleading guilty and agreeing to continue testifying, Sayegh would spend less than ten years in prison and be placed in the witness-protection program after his release. In addition, the Saudis would send his wife and two children to the United States and not seek his deportation. On June 12, 1997, Sayegh and the United States entered into a signed and sealed plea agreement.

Five days later, Sayegh arrived at Dulles Airport—and almost at once the agreement began to unravel, just as Berger had feared. Sayegh now said, according to Michael Wildes, his lawyer at the time, that he didn't want his wife to come to the United States, because she would go to casinos and night clubs. Sayegh was given a new lawyer, Francis Carter (who later briefly represented Monica Lewinsky), and five weeks later Carter told the judge that Sayegh was backing out of his plea agreement. Carter also said that if the government went forward he planned to challenge the admissibility of Sayegh's statements, claiming that they were "illegally obtained" from someone who didn't understand the American legal system. Freeh's strategy at this point, according to Berger, was to frighten Sayegh into coöperating. "As they were driving him to the airport, they'd say, in effect, 'Have a nice time in Saudi Arabia, where, by the way, they will cut off your head,' " Berger said.

In May of 1997, during the Sayegh negotiations, Mohammad Khatami, a relative moderate, was elected President of Iran. A few days later, Clinton said, "I have never been pleased about the estrangements between the people of the United States and the people of Iran." He said, "What we hope for is a reconciliation with a country that does not believe that terrorism is a legitimate extension of political policies." The State Department, meanwhile, was sending a message of its own—that Louis Freeh was overstepping his bounds. Esposito and others at the F.B.I. noticed that it began to get harder to get approval from the State Department to travel for the investigation. This interference, Esposito said, just emboldened Freeh, who called upon one of his personal relationships: he asked Secretary of Defense William Cohen to support him with the Saudis, telling Cohen that the Saudis were trying to decide if Freeh was the only one who cared. "He needed to build some allies for this effort, because, clearly, there was no big effort being made by the White House or the State Department," said a senior Pentagon official. Cohen agreed to help.

Over the summer, Freeh continued to press for access to the men in custody, though he was aware that Saudi law, which is based on Sharia, or Islamic law, prevents questioning of Saudi suspects by foreign police. In mid-July, the Syrian government turned over another key cell member, a Saudi known as Khassab, and Freeh wanted to interview him, too, but the Saudis refused. To complicate matters, the Saudis were now talking separately with Iran.

That same year, Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah met in Pakistan with the outgoing Iranian President, Hashemi Rafsanjani, and brought up the terrorist attack. "We know you did it," Abdullah told Rafsanjani, according to two people with knowledge of the conversation. Rafsanjani, in this account, insisted that he was not involved personally, but that if any Iranian had a role "it was he"—Ayatollah Khamenei, the country's supreme leader—and he pointed upward. Berger said he knew from intelligence sources that the Saudis were trying to persuade the Iranians that the United States wouldn't retaliate if the Iranians would hand over more suspects. But Berger wouldn't make that bargain. "You can't decide what the U.S. response will be," Berger said he told Bandar. "The Saudis can make a separate peace, but you can't make one for us."

On September 10, 1997, the United States government moved to dismiss the indictment against Sayegh, citing his refusal to coöperate as well as their inability to obtain corroborating witnesses. Freeh was frustrated, Bandar told an associate, but in the White House people acted like it was a "gift from Heaven." From that moment on, Bandar believed, political pressure from the White House ceased for good. In Bandar's view, Clinton was a romantic who had become excited by the possibility of converting his Iranian adversary. Bandar told Freeh that he had once told White House officials that the Saudis could close the investigation, so that no one would have to retaliate against Iran. "I bet they were smiling," Freeh responded.

IV

On December 11, 1997, Freeh drove to the F.B.I.'s training academy in Quantico, Virginia. He had invited the families of the nineteen men who were killed at Khobar to join him there to talk about the case. For three days, Freeh met with the families and shared all their meals with them. "He was there morning, noon, and night," said Fran Heiser, whose thirty-five-year-old son, Michael, a master sergeant, had been killed in the blast. At one point, standing near a scale model of Building 131 and the crater,

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THE SPORTING SCENE

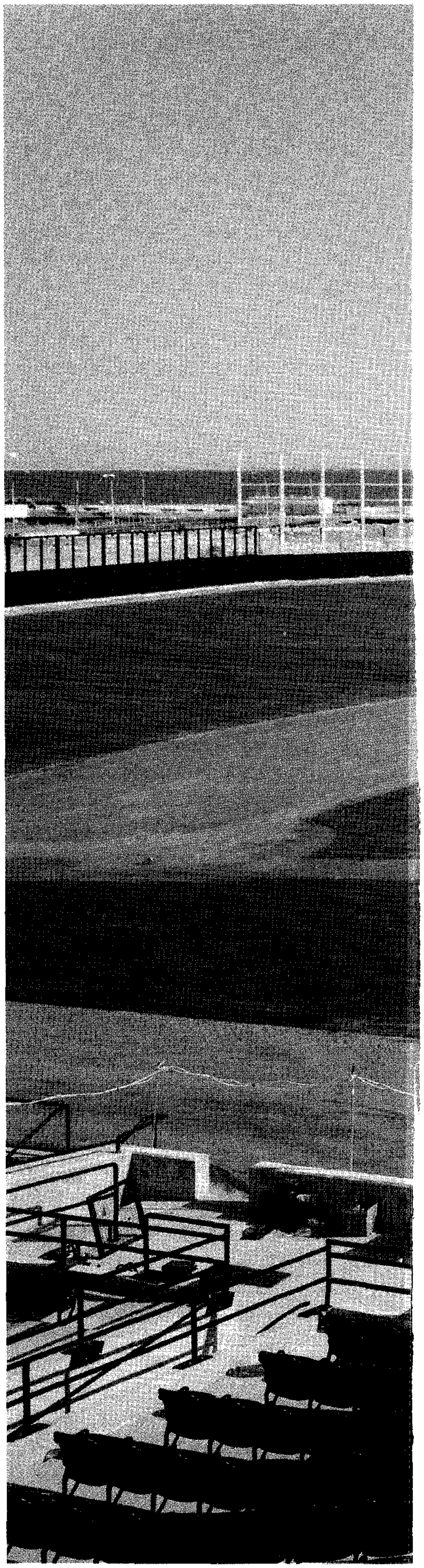
BY ROBERT POLIDORI

BEACH BALL

The feeble Mets will play the Cubs at Wrigley Field on June 25th, and a bunch of their bruised fans may take the chance to hop down to Coney Island and catch the baby Mets, a.k.a. the Brooklyn Cyclones, in their home opener. Not too big a bunch, please: the 'Clones' brand-new stadium, KeySpan Park, seats sixty-five hundred, which is just about right for the low-level Class A ball on display here. The team plays in the New York-Penn League, where most of the players are just-graduated college stars recently drafted into organized baseball. Scouts will be on hand all summer, chewing saltwater taffy while they decide which of these kids can run and throw and even hit a little, and maybe move along next year to a higher level, and which (a majority) belong in an amusement park.

Beginning pros are all hustle and ambition, and lately the parent big-league clubs have been moving the attraction closer to town. The Cyclones' predecessors played in Pittsfield, Massachusetts (where the sun sets, remarkably, behind center field), and the Yankees' Oneonta, New York, entry now disports itself in Staten Island. Mayor Rudy Giuliani was able to push a combined hundred and ten million dollars for the Cyclones' and Yankees' miniparks past the City Council. But never mind the money. Old Mets Bobby Ojeda and Howard Johnson will be on the field (as pitching and batting coach, respectively) with the Cyclones, and Edgardo Alfonzo's brother Edgar (yep) is managing. In this dreamy setting, players can tell themselves they're only one MetroCard fare away from making the show. Sure, guys. In reality, the trip involves three line changes (from the F train to the G to the E to the 7), forty stops, and . . . oh, four years.

—*Roger Angell*



Freeh told the families that he was committed to doing everything he could to find out who was responsible and to bring them to justice. He gave a slide show on the known suspects. Some of the families were angry that the Saudis hadn't provided more information and that the Administration hadn't pushed them harder. Heiser said that someone demanded, "Why do we allow them to get away with murder?" Freeh said that he was committed to the truth. "I am not a politician. I am a policeman," he said repeatedly.

When I asked Freeh about the meeting in Quantico, it was a late afternoon in October. It had grown dark while we spoke, and Freeh walked me to my car. "What they wanted to hear from some person and not some institution was that these nineteen lives were very important collectively and individually and that this was a case that was going to be pursued," he said. "I've talked to victims and survivors for years in different things that I have done. But what was very different about this was that I was very impressed with the dignity and discipline of these families. Of course, these are military families. There weren't any recriminations. There wasn't any anger. . . . What they wanted to know was that somebody would follow the case and be faithful to it and not give it up."

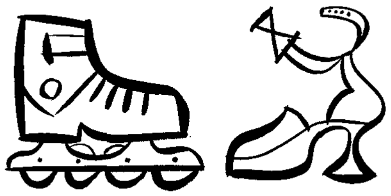
At the time of Freeh's session in Quantico, there were new signs of moderation in Iran. After a public interview in which President Khatami condemned terrorism and suggested that there be more contact between Iranian and American citizens, an American wrestling team visited Iran. Clinton extended a reciprocal invitation, and the State Department urged waiving a regulation requiring the fingerprinting of all visiting Iranians. Freeh objected; one of the team members was a suspected intelligence agent. "The F.B.I. saw these teams as Trojan horses," Berger told me. In a meeting with Albright and Reno, Berger sided with Albright.

Freeh knew that the Administration wanted to give Khatami a chance to control Iran's intelligence services, but he was also listening to Dale Watson, the F.B.I. anti-terrorism chief, who believed that Iran's new secular leader would turn out to be a puppet of Ayatollah Khamenei. He wondered what kind of signal it sent to pursue a criminal investigation and make diplomatic overtures at the same time. "We said this in no way means we're not going to go after Khobar," Berger insisted. "These two policies weren't in conflict."

In many ways, the argument between Berger and Freeh was a very old one—a dispute between a pragmatist and a moralist, similar to the debate over establishing favorable trade status with China while condemning human-rights violations, or, for that matter, pursuing a friendly alliance with Saddam Hussein in the years just before the Gulf War. The collision between the demands of law enforcement and those of diplomacy intensified the conflict. Freeh believed that the Clinton Administration had compromised itself in an unforgivable way by seeming to waver in its commitment to resolving the bombing case. In mid-June, when Madeleine Albright, speaking at the Asia Society in New York, said that the recent changes in Iran created a "historic opportunity" to end twenty years of hostile relations, the F.B.I. became even more distrustful.

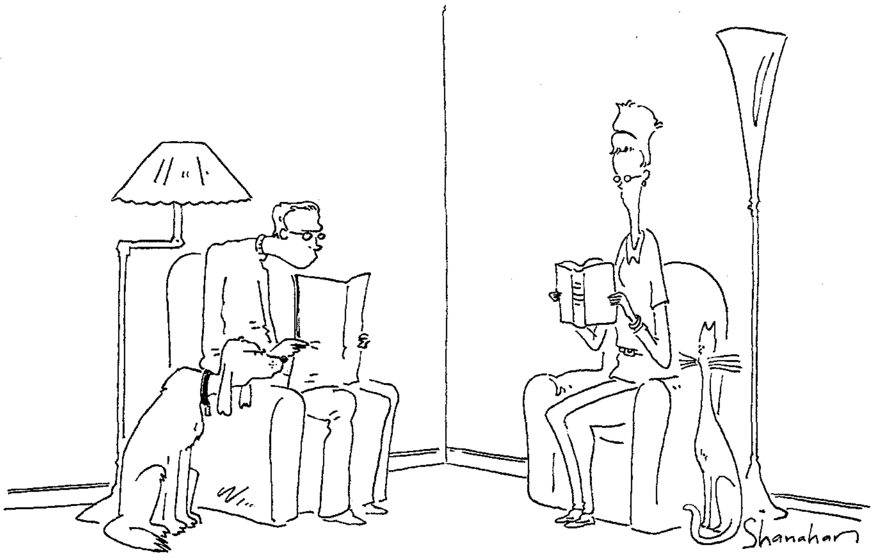
"It's possible that there was a communication breakdown," Berger acknowledged to me. "But the facts are—and this is fundamental—in every way we were asked to do and ways we were not asked to do we pressed the Saudis. Does that mean we weren't trying to make some outreach to Iran? No. There are two governments in Iran, and our fundamental policy was to try to support and strengthen the reformists . . . so there would be no more Khobars." Over the summer of 1998, the number of F.B.I. agents stationed in Saudi Arabia dropped from dozens to a single legal attaché.

That summer concluded a series of dismal months for the Clinton Administration, beginning with the reports in January that Kenneth Starr, the independent counsel, was looking into the President's relationship with a former White House intern, Monica Lewinsky. On August 7th, terrorists attacked the United States Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, killing more than two hundred and fifty people and injuring more than five thousand. About four hundred F.B.I. agents were sent to the sites to gather evidence, which pointed to Osama bin Laden, the millionaire Saudi exile and leader of a terrorist network. The Administration began planning a missile strike against a suspected bin Laden terrorist training camp in Afghanistan as well as against a pharmaceuticals plant in Sudan thought to be manufacturing chemical-warfare materials. Freeh, who was scheduled to go to Kenya and Tanzania, privately urged that any retaliatory strike be delayed. "My fear always is that these attacks occur and then the real attack is designed for when the hundred F.B.I. people show up," he told me. Freeh had just arrived in Kenya when he learned that Tomahawk missiles would be launched within forty-five minutes.



Three days earlier, Clinton had given grand-jury testimony in which, after months of denial, he admitted to a sexual relationship with Lewinsky. Bear Bryant, who was by then second-in-command, feared for Freeh's safety. He was suspicious about the timing of the air strikes, believing that Clinton had wanted to divert attention from the Lewinsky affair. Bryant called Reno. "I thought it was a very dangerous thing to do," Bryant said. "I told her I thought it was as crazy as hell. I was very strident. She didn't disagree. She also thought they shouldn't do it. But nothing could be done to stop it, because it was a done deal. I got off the phone and started arranging transport for everyone to get the hell out of there if need be."

Freeh was not directly involved in the Starr investigation, but he had been kept informed. (When Starr left his post, Freeh wrote to thank him, saying, "We have all been greatly impressed with your sacrifice, persistence, and uncompromising personal and professional integrity.") Freeh insisted that F.B.I. investigations involving the White House did not spring from animus but, rather, from what he saw as his duty to protect the Bureau's independence. He even thought that Starr's pursuit of the Lewinsky case was a diversion from more urgent matters, in particular the alleged involvement of China in the 1996 campaign. When the House released Starr's report,



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in September, Freeh thought back on his first meeting with Clinton, at which the President had talked to him about the importance of family. Most people, Freeh thought, would have fled the White House in embarrassment. By that time, he had not spoken with the President for two years.

Two weeks after the Starr report, Crown Prince Abdullah arrived in Washington from Saudi Arabia; for six days, his entourage took over the hundred-and-forty-three-room Hay-Adams Hotel, near the White House. The accounts of Clinton's meeting with the Crown Prince vary, as do accounts of Gore's meeting with him. All sides, however, agree that the meeting was a turning point in the Khobar investigation—the catalyst for the Saudis to begin sharing evidence with the F.B.I. Berger, who was present, told me that Clinton brought up the Khobar barracks case. The families needed closure, Berger recalled Clinton saying: " 'Even if they can't always get full justice, they can get the truth.' " Berger went on, "He talked about how important it was to the U.S.-Saudi relationship, and that if Americans didn't believe the Saudis were helping the United States in the investigation then the American public would not support the U.S. defending Saudi Arabia." Berger also said that Clinton repeated his assurances that the United States would not take military action against Iran without consulting the Saudis.

Two others familiar with the conversation said that Crown Prince Abdullah and Bandar, who was also at the meeting, had a very different interpretation of what was said. Clinton, they said, mentioned Khobar only briefly. "It was along the line of 'Would you be kind enough to continue coöperation?' " one source said. Mostly, they remembered the Crown Prince consoling Clinton about his legal troubles. At one point, the Crown Prince, who was wearing a black robe, said to Clinton, "All those who attack you and are making such a big issue out of this"—the Lewinsky affair—"should be like the lint on my robes. One should just throw them off." The Crown Prince shook his robe. Clinton, by many accounts, was almost crying. "He also told Clinton that he would talk to people on the Hill and tell them they should respect the Presidency and not wipe the floor with it." Clinton and the Crown Prince then had a long conversation about the Middle East and the internal situation in Iran—and the importance of supporting moderate elements there. After Clinton left, according to these sources, the Crown Prince was puzzled. Bandar had warned him to expect some "very important questions" about Khobar, but Clinton had not raised them. "What's going on?" the Crown Prince asked Bandar. Gore, who was supposed to press the Khobar case the hardest, had mentioned it only briefly, in reply to a question asked by the Crown Prince about the status of Sayegh, who had appealed for political asylum and, a year later, had still not been deported. Gore confined his reply to the legal issue surrounding Sayegh. (Sayegh was finally sent to Saudi Arabia in October of 1999.)

The effect of this meeting, Bandar told Freeh, was to persuade the Crown Prince that the case was no longer of great importance to the United States, and that prompted Freeh to take an extraordinary step: he approached former President George Bush and asked him to intervene with the Saudi royal family. When I asked Freeh about this last week, he said, "I don't want to get into the details of that," but others close to him confirm it. Clinton, apparently, never knew that his predecessor in the White House had become a special emissary for the F.B.I. director.

The intercession worked; Bush has been regarded as something of a savior in Saudi Arabia since the Gulf War. After talking with the elder Bush, the Crown Prince asked Bandar to send for Freeh. On September 29th, Freeh arrived at Bandar's McLean estate with Dale Watson, the Bureau's anti-terrorism chief.

"We respect your laws and Sharia," Freeh said, according to someone who has read the official notes from the meeting. He also conceded that if he were in the Mubahith, the Saudi equivalent of the F.B.I., he probably would oppose working with the Bureau. Freeh then asked if the Crown Prince would allow the F.B.I. to interview the suspects in custody. The Crown Prince proposed a compromise: the F.B.I. could write questions and monitor the replies as a Saudi officer posed them. "Combatting terrorism is a duty not only called for by all religions, but it is a duty to the human race," the Crown Prince was quoted as saying.

The Crown Prince, by all accounts, was impressed by Freeh and persuaded by his forthrightness. He'd found Freeh respectful of Saudi concerns in a way that, to his mind, the White House and its foreign-policy apparatus had not been. The F.B.I. had also promised to provide forensic training to the Mubahith, which the Saudis were eager to have. The Crown Prince told Bandar to call Prince Nayef, the Saudi Interior Minister, who was overseeing the investigation, and to instruct him to give the F.B.I. full access to the Saudi evidence and witnesses. Bandar told Freeh, but suggested that the news be kept quiet. It would not necessarily be an advantage if their neighbors in the Middle East thought that they were coöperating. "If anything leaks, we will know it will be from Louis Freeh," the Crown Prince had said just before the meeting in McLean.

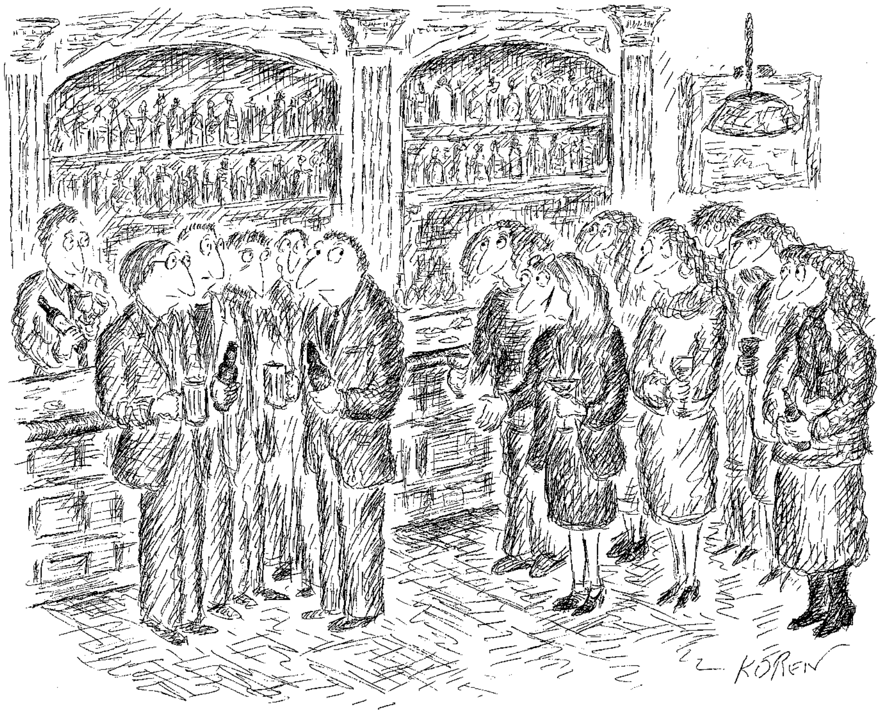
V

On November 9, 1998, Freeh finally got what he had been seeking for two and a half years. From behind a one-way mirror, F.B.I. agents watched and listened as Saudi law-enforcement officers posed the Bureau's two hundred and twelve questions to eight suspects. The suspects confirmed their involvement in the bombing and described how the Iranians had ordered, supported, and financed the attack. Khassab, the cell member who had been turned over by the Syrians, claimed that he had met directly with Ahmad Sherifi, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard official who had selected the Khobar barracks as a target, and that Sherifi always announced that he was acting at the behest of Ayatollah Khamenei. The Saudis also gave the F.B.I. samples of all physical evidence and transcripts of interviews with other cell members. Earlier, the Saudis had shared highly confidential—and, to their minds, vital—intelligence information collected in Syria, which showed that the suspects had stopped at the Iranian Embassy in Damascus to pick up Iranian passports and that they had travelled through the Syrian airport on their way to Iran and Lebanon for training.

Soon after Freeh received these reports, he went to Berger's West Wing office to tell him that they might finally have the evidence necessary to bring indictments. Freeh told Berger that he was looking into whether the United States could take testimony in Saudi Arabia for a grand jury in the States; it was a novel legal concept, and the Saudis had not yet agreed to it. Almost before Freeh could finish, Berger demanded, "Who else knows about this?" Did the press know? This was the last question that Freeh expected from a national-security adviser. Not many people knew, Freeh replied. The information was very closely held. Berger also questioned some of the statements linking the bombing to the Iranian government.

"That's just hearsay," Berger said.

"No, Sandy," Freeh replied. "It's testimony of a co-conspirator in furtherance of a conspiracy." Berger, Freeh later thought, was not a national-security adviser; he was a public-relations hack, interested in how something would play in the press. After more than two years, Freeh had concluded that the Administration did not really want to resolve the Khobar bombing.



"Do any of you guys need a wife?"

When I asked Berger about this, he seemed baffled by Freeh's interpretation. He told me that he'd asked Freeh who else knew because "I didn't want to see this in the Washington *Post* before I had a chance to talk to the President about it. I thought it was a fair question." As national-security adviser, Berger said, he had a responsibility to give the President breathing room to make decisions. Berger also felt that the F.B.I. had a tendency to leak. Then he pointed out that in the course of the investigation a low-level F.B.I. employee inadvertently sent a classified F.B.I. report on Khobar, which included transcripts of some interviews, to hundreds of people in the government. As for characterizing the statements made by suspects as "hearsay," Berger said that, for the most part, the men in custody were talking about meetings in which they were not participants.

Berger, a graduate of Harvard Law School who specialized in international law, recalled, "I asked Louis whether what he had was hearsay. 'Can you use it in a courtroom?' . . . I wanted to know how we could use it"—to obtain indictments. Berger said he had had no idea that Freeh was upset when he left. He had ended the meeting by telling Freeh to let him know if there was anything else he could do to help. "What did we know about Khobar?" Berger later asked me. "We know it was done by the Saudi Hezbollah. We know that they were trained in Iran by Iranians. We know there was Iranian involvement. What has yet to be established is how substantial the Iranian involvement was"—in other words, whether it had been promoted and sanctioned by the Iranian government.

Not long after Freeh's meeting with Berger, Bandar and Massoud went to see Berger to discuss the information that the Saudis had shared with Freeh. "Why are you giving us all this stuff?" Berger asked the Saudis. "Because you were bugging the hell out of us for it," Bandar replied. Bandar left the meeting shaking his head, believing that Berger was upset because the Administration could not ignore hard evidence tying the bombing to Iran. Bandar and Massoud later approached Freeh, and one of them said, "What the hell is going on? We went to bat for you and then Berger asks, 'Why are you telling us this now?' "

"Guess what," Freeh replied, in this account. "I got the same reaction."

Berger said that he had been angry because the Saudis had knowingly withheld the most conclusive evidence—which they'd had within months of the bombing. He was also weary of Bandar's maneuverings. "They had engaged in a kind of game for two years of trying to make a separate peace with Iran and told us, 'We will only give you this information if you promise not to do anything with it or promise to obliterate Iran from the face of the earth,' " Berger told me.

At about the same time, Freeh wrote a confidential memo summarizing the case. Since this was a national-security case with potentially significant foreign-policy implications, any decision to pursue criminal charges would probably be made by the President. Freeh later told someone who had worked closely with him that he had written the memo because he was skeptical that the Administration would take any action. "He told me he had done this because he knew that one day this could come back to haunt him and he felt he needed to be covered," this person told me recently. "He wanted to have something in the system explaining his views. So it's there."

Bandar and Massoud concluded that the relationship between the Administration and Freeh had completely deteriorated. Whenever Freeh's name came up, they noticed that Berger's body language signalled discomfort. In Bandar's view, Freeh's disillusionment made him dangerous—someone who would act on what he thought was right regardless of the consequences. "Freeh is a lovely human being," Bandar told one associate. "But he is much more sophisticated and deadly than benign."

In the summer of 1999, President Clinton sent a message to President Khatami through a senior Omani official asking Khatami for help in the Khobar investigation. The official had been instructed to deliver it only when he was alone with the Iranian President. According to one person who saw the message and read part of it to me, Clinton made two main points: first, that the United States had solid evidence of Iranian involvement in the bombing and, second, that he wanted Khatami to coöperate with Saudi investigators. In return, Clinton said, the United States would be willing to explore ways that the two countries could work together. As it happened, Khatami was not alone when he received the letter. He replied through an emissary that the Iranians did not know what Clinton was talking about.

Someone in Iran leaked Clinton's letter to journalists in the Middle East, and they in turn emphasized Iran's rejection of it. The Saudis were angry that they hadn't been told about the letter and wondered what else the United States might be up to. Bandar asked Berger why Freeh, at least, hadn't been informed. Bandar later told an associate that Berger had said Freeh had a tin ear for politics—that he didn't know a thing about foreign affairs and could lead the United States into war.

"That's bullshit," Berger said when I repeated this to him. "I would never say anything disparaging like that about a colleague to Bandar. He would dine out on that for a month." He added that he found it ironic that the Saudis were indignant that they had not been told the United States was sending a letter to the Iranians when the Saudis had been making overtures to the Iranians for two years. "What's the Saudi equivalent of chutzpah?"

That fall, the Administration publicly acknowledged for the first time that Iranian officials were under investigation. "We have information about the involvement of some Iranian officials in the Khobar attack," Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Martin Indyk said in little-noticed testimony at his Senate confirmation hearings to be United States Ambassador to Israel. "We have not yet reached the conclusion that the Iranian government was involved or responsible for the attack."

VI

Last October, a terrorist attack on the U.S.S. Cole, stationed near Yemen, killed seventeen American sailors. Once more, Freeh dispatched F.B.I. agents and went to the scene himself. (He also stopped in Saudi Arabia, landing late at night and meeting into the morning with Saudi officials to discuss the Khobar investigation.) When he returned, Freeh spoke briefly to Clinton; it was the first time they had spoken in four years.

By then, the Saudis had agreed that they would allow some suspects to testify if the United States brought indictments against Iranian officials. Freeh, though, had already decided to wait for a change in Administrations. Earlier this year, after briefing President Bush on the status of the investigation—as well as Secretary of State Colin Powell, National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, and Attorney General John Ashcroft—Freeh asked for a new federal prosecutor to be assigned to the case, presumably to present the case to the grand jury if a decision is made to go forward with indictments. One senior Bush Administration official who will be involved in the decision—which bureau officials hope will be resolved before the end of June, when Freeh leaves—has hinted that the new Administration will probably not oppose the indictments. In the interim, he said, the Administration had put its Iran policy on hold because it wanted to avoid the appearance of inconsistency in reaching out to Iran while simultaneously indicting Iranian officials.

With Freeh set to leave his post in early summer, it is easy to imagine that indictments in the Khobar barracks case would mark a sort of end to his battles with the Clinton Administration as well as a vindication of his doggedness. If the Bush Administration decides not to act, Freeh nevertheless believes that he will finally be able to tell the families of the dead Americans what happened that June nearly five years ago. The Clinton-era scandals and the public embarrassments of the Bureau certainly occupied much of his time, but nothing absorbed him as much—as deeply and as personally—as the Khobar barracks bombing.

In one of our last interviews, Freeh told me that he had been asked by the captain of the U.S.S. Cole to address the surviving sailors when he was in Yemen: "So I spoke to them, and you get up in front of them and you realize they are all twenty, nineteen, eighteen years of age. And I gave them our prayers and condolences. I told them that this tragedy had just occurred, but, as long as it took, somebody in the F.B.I. would be working on this case, diligently and persistently, until we found the people responsible and were able to identify them." ♦

ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

THE NEXT BIG BET

Is a family of depressed morticians HBO's best hope for life after "The Sopranos"?

BY TAD FRIEND

One afternoon last November, the six writers of the new Home Box Office drama "Six Feet Under" were sprawled in a conference room at Sunset Gower Studios, in Hollywood. They were watching the dailies of the second episode of the show, which is about the Fisher family and its unusual place of business: a funeral home. On the television screen, Peter Krause, who plays Nate Fisher, the elder son, was consoling a young widow; he wore a casual shirt and a scruffy beard. "Shouldn't he be wearing a tie?" someone asked.

"He's not about formality," Kate Robin, one of the writers, said. After a minute, she added, dreamily, "That is one fine-looking mortician."

As the scenes unfolded, the writers muttered imprecations: one guest star "breathes like Noriega"; another, who mangled his lines, was labelled "the paraphraser." Then Claire Fisher, the teen-age daughter, appeared half-naked onscreen, radiant in a postcoital moment with Gabriel, a classmate with hoop earrings and a devastating smile. The group subsided, picking at the standard writers' buffet: peanuts, M&M's, Tootsie Roll Pops, After Eight mints, and Atomic Fire Balls. Finally, Christian Williams, who wrote the episode, ran a hand through his graying hair and said, "It's the memory of this-age sex that ruins all other sex for me."

Alan Ball, the creator of "Six Feet Under," walked into the room, and everyone perked up. Ball is a dark-haired man of forty-three, with a scimitar nose and the warm, ingratiating smile of someone who likes to spill secrets. As the pouches under his eyes attest, he writes best in the vicinity of 3 A.M., when, primed by bad TV—"Once Upon a Hamster," on Animal Planet, for example—his anger and sorrow and bitchy humor make their way onto the page. Last year, Ball, a network-sitcom veteran, won an Academy Award for his first screenplay, "American Beauty." Like the characters in that film, the Fishers of "Six Feet Under" are sardonic and screwed up. Nate is a soulful social drop-out who sees marriage as the enemy; Claire spends much of the first episode high on crystal meth; and David, the middle child, is chalky-faced and remote, seemingly the ideal funeral-home director—but he's also a closeted gay man who is about to plunge into a night life of clubs, drugs, and one-night stands.

Early in Ball's pilot episode, which will début on HBO on June 3rd, Claire phones home and reaches her brother David. The topic is Nate, who is flying in from Seattle, where he works in an organic-food market:

CLAIRE
Is Nate there?

DAVID
Nope.

CLAIRE
I thought he was coming in tonight, so we could do the whole forced Christmas Eve family thing.

DAVID
. . . Dad's gone to the airport to pick Nate up. And Mom's in the kitchen making something really complicated and resenting it.

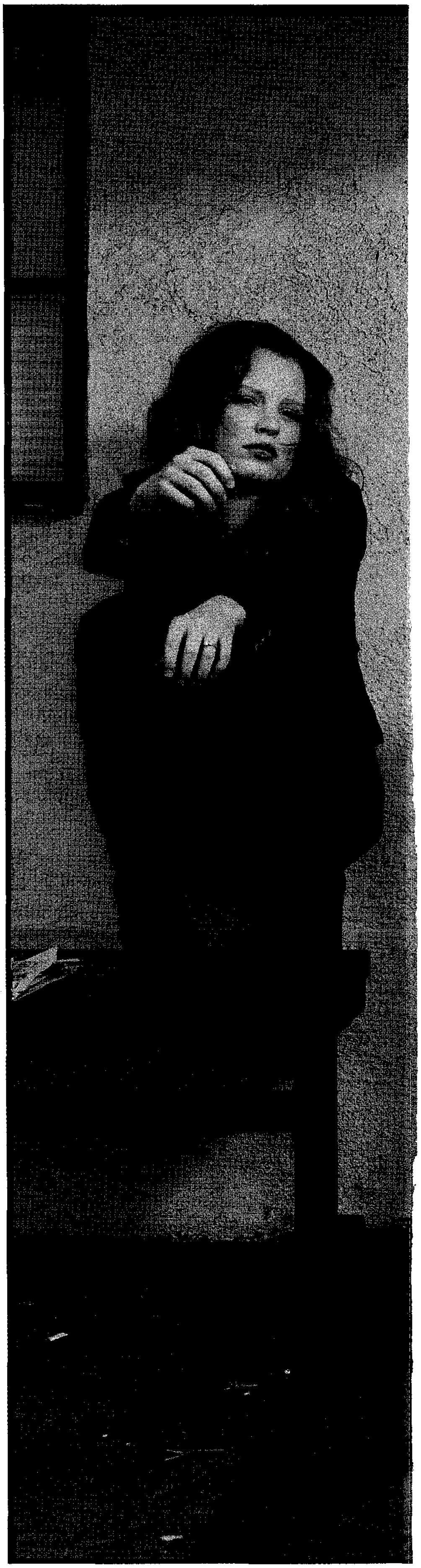
CLAIRE
Damn. Okay, I might be a little late—

DAVID
Claire. This is one of the few times a year we're all together.

CLAIRE
All right, don't get all Pat Robertson on me.

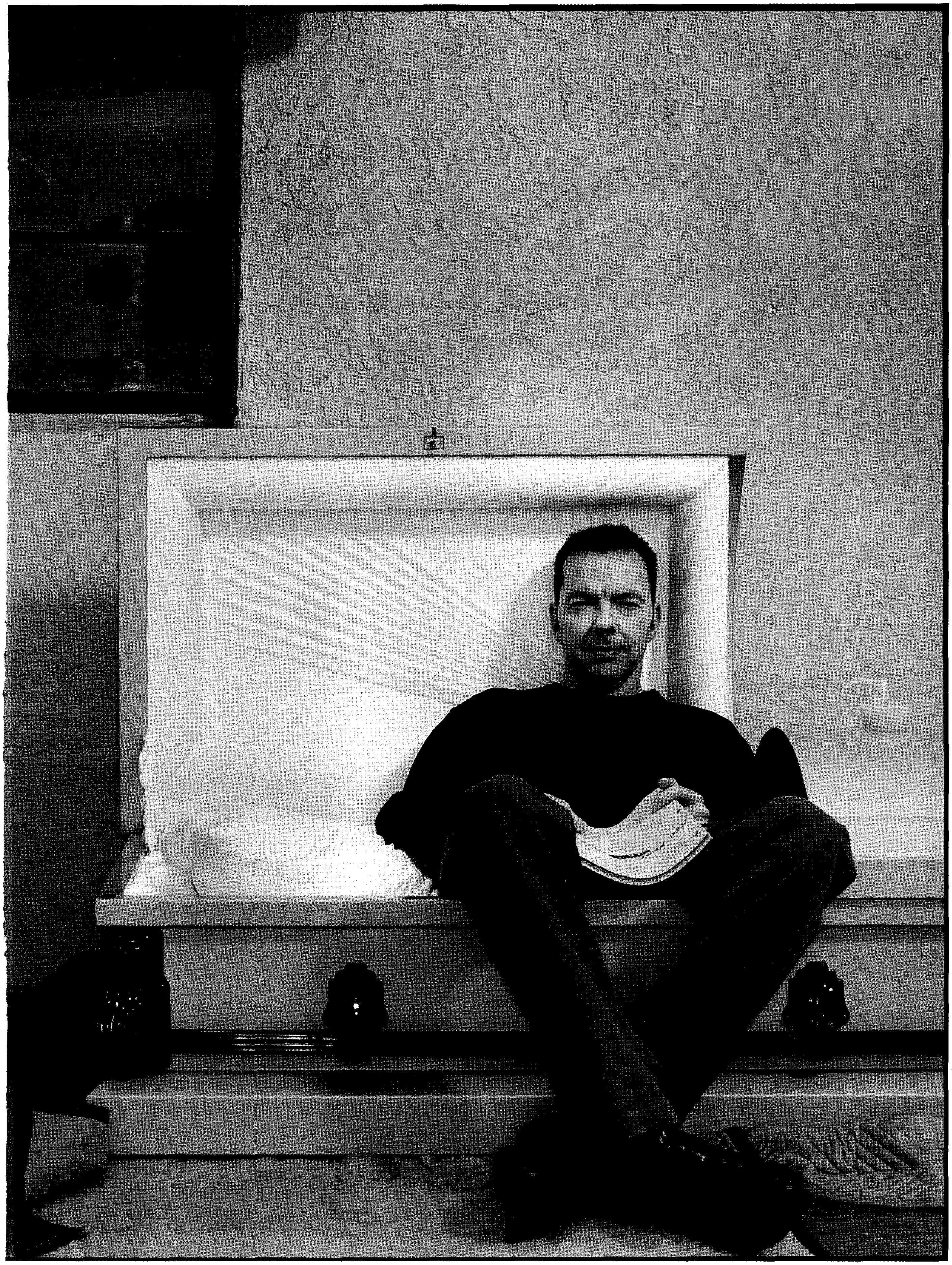
Viewers know that the family will never be all together again: we have just seen the father get hit by a bus.

At the broadcast networks—ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox, UPN, and the WB—no one important ever dies in a pilot episode, because, according to focus



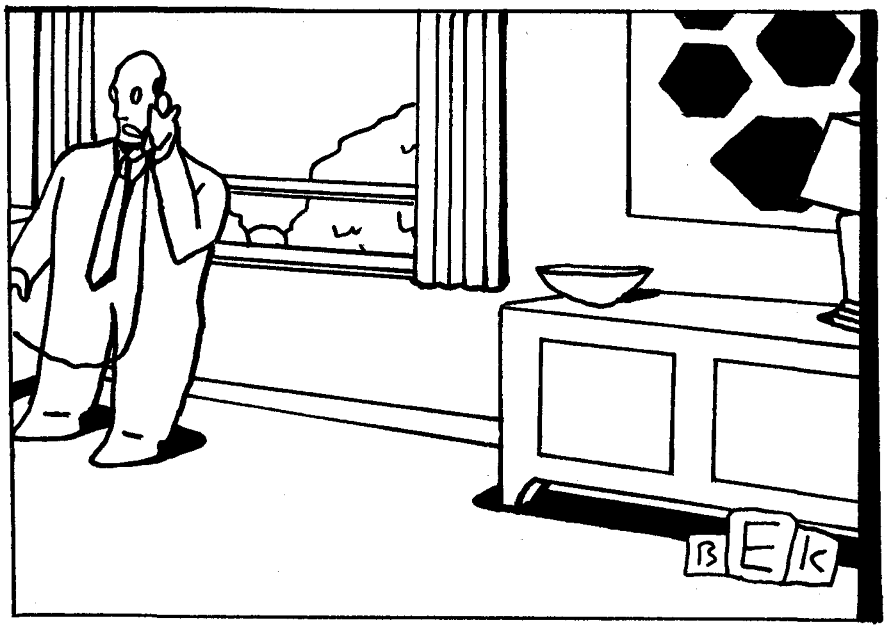
"Six Feet Under"'s creator, Alan Ball, with

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARTIN SCHOELLER



SABA

Lauren Ambrose. "Is there a way to market it that's not going to make people want to shoot themselves?" an HBO executive asks.



"You'll have to excuse me—I'm myself today."

groups, audiences find death alarming. (In a short-lived NBC medical drama, "Lifestories," the lead character died of colon cancer in the pilot. One of the show's writers recalls that the network's advertisers were outraged: "Fuck you guys! He died!") But "Six Feet Under" is steeped in death. Each episode begins with a guest star's demise, and one story line always features the Fisher family dealing with the relatives and friends of the deceased—and with the deceased, who can be counted on to sit up on the embalming table to inform David Fisher that his life sucks.

All this morbidity is just fine with HBO, a company that advertises itself with the tag line "It's Not TV. It's HBO." "Six Feet Under" is the first drama series that the channel has launched since "The Sopranos," in 1999, and HBO feels enormous pressure to repeat that series' popular and critical success. (Before "The Sopranos," the network seemed content to intersperse three-year-old movies, boxing matches, and reality shows like "Taxicab Confessions" with an assortment of smart but notably esoteric programs like "The Larry Sanders Show" and "Mr. Show.") With "The Sopranos" rumored to end after its next season, HBO is eager to produce shows that confirm its audacious marketing claim that—contrary to every rule laid down since "The Beverly Hillbillies" went one way and PBS the other—television can be both profitable and of high quality.

This is a straddle made possible by the fact that HBO, as its name suggests, is in the business of selling programs to viewers, while the "free" networks are in the business of selling viewers to advertisers. For the most part, HBO's executives have encouraged Ball to break loose, to repudiate the formulas he learned working on such sitcoms as "Cybill." They want "Six Feet Under," like "The Sopranos," to be the strongest possible counterpoint to network television. And Ball has responded. In one episode, Claire Fisher, played by Lauren Ambrose, tells her mother that the "touchy-feely mother-daughter relationships you see in the movies or on TV" don't exist. The pilot is punctuated by fake commercials for mortuary products such as "wound filler" and de-luxe hearses—grenades that Ball is aiming not just at the content of many network ads but at their very existence. If you can watch feel-good shows for free on CBS, the argument goes, why would you pay for them on HBO? On the other hand, if "Six Feet Under," in which HBO has invested thirty million dollars, is too much of a feel-bad show, why would anyone pay for that, either?

In the conference room, Ball pushed up the sleeves of his cashmere V neck, and he and the writers began a three-hour session of working out, or "breaking," the ninth episode. So far, they had decided that Nate, who has moved back home to help run the family business, visits other funeral homes pretending to comparison shop, to see how the competition helps people grieve. Treated cursorily by two morticians, he then meets with a Filipino funeral director who offers up some profound—and as yet unwritten—truths about death.

"A Filipino?" Christian Williams mused.

"Maybe a white-bearded black man—" Kate Robin said, with a smirk.

"—who radiates wisdom and teaches us awful white people how to grieve," Ball said, deadpan. It is a staple of TV drama that spiritually impoverished white folk learn life lessons from ruminative old black men and self-effacing Asians.

The "guest death" in this episode is the six-year-old half brother of Claire's friend Gabriel. The writers were trying to create Gabriel's "back story." "Are we saying his stepfather was abusive to him?" Ball wondered. "That feels a little 'Afterschool Special.' It's more realistic if his problems just stem from neglect."

"We love to hate Gabriel," Kate Robin said in an arch, voice-over voice.

"We love to hate Gabriel until—" Ball began, also adopting a TV-announcer tone.

"Until we realize he's just a *person*," someone offered.

Another writer completed the arc of lameness: "He's just a broken little boy."

Everyone started to laugh, but it was slightly sheepish laughter: the writers realized how drawn they were to clichés, even as they recognized them as such.

"Claire began the show as the act-out child," Kate Robin said, her knees drawn up to her chest, "but here she realizes she's so much stronger than Gabriel." (Robin, the show's youngest writer and its only female one, was an Off-Off Broadway playwright when she was hired to help develop the women characters. She suddenly found herself earning five thousand dollars a week and being urged by her colleague Christian Williams, a former Washington *Post* editor, to buy a BMW.)

Alan Ball picked up Robin's notion: "Now Claire is stronger than she herself thought."

“And her strength comes from compassion,” Robin said, “which is beautiful, and how it really happens.”

Williams looked at her over his reading glasses: “We’re going to make it to ABC eventually.”

“Yowch,” Robin said, and shut up.

After the writers’ meeting, Ball went to his office down the hall, where a framed “American Booty” porn video box pays sidewise tribute to his proudest achievement. He talked about why he dislikes network television. “The reason network executives always tell you to make the story softer, to iron out the edge, is that network TV exists as a vehicle for marketing,” he said, with the crusading zeal of a convert. “So they want as large an audience as possible, an audience that’s cheerful, chuckling, primed by the fantasy in the shows for the fantasy of the products. The idea is ‘If I watch this show and buy these products, I’ll wear great sweaters like Chandler on “Friends” and have snappy comebacks, too.’ I’ve tried to be that kind of writer—but I resented having to modify my stories so they’d be a more efficient delivery vehicle for Burger King.”

“Mitchell Fink is such a worm! A lowly little sneak!” Richard Plepler, an HBO executive vice-president, had been railing about Mitchell Fink, a gossip columnist at the *News*, for the last twenty-four hours, and he continued over lunch in Chris Albrecht’s corner office, in Century City.

“He’s a cocksucker,” Albrecht, HBO’s president of original programming, replied, looking up from a Caesar salad. Albrecht, a compact man with sparse brown hair, is a former standup comic.

“Why would you want to ruin the fun for people? What kind of scoop is that?” continued Plepler, a gregarious man who seems to be perpetually tan. It was early in November, and Fink had just published some plotlines for the upcoming third season of “The Sopranos.” “I can’t decide whether to leave Mitchell one of those ‘We’re all very disappointed’ messages or drop a note to Mort, who I know very well,” Plepler said, referring to Mortimer B. Zuckerman, who owns the *News*. “I mean, Mitchell fucking Fink! He’s not even syndicated!”

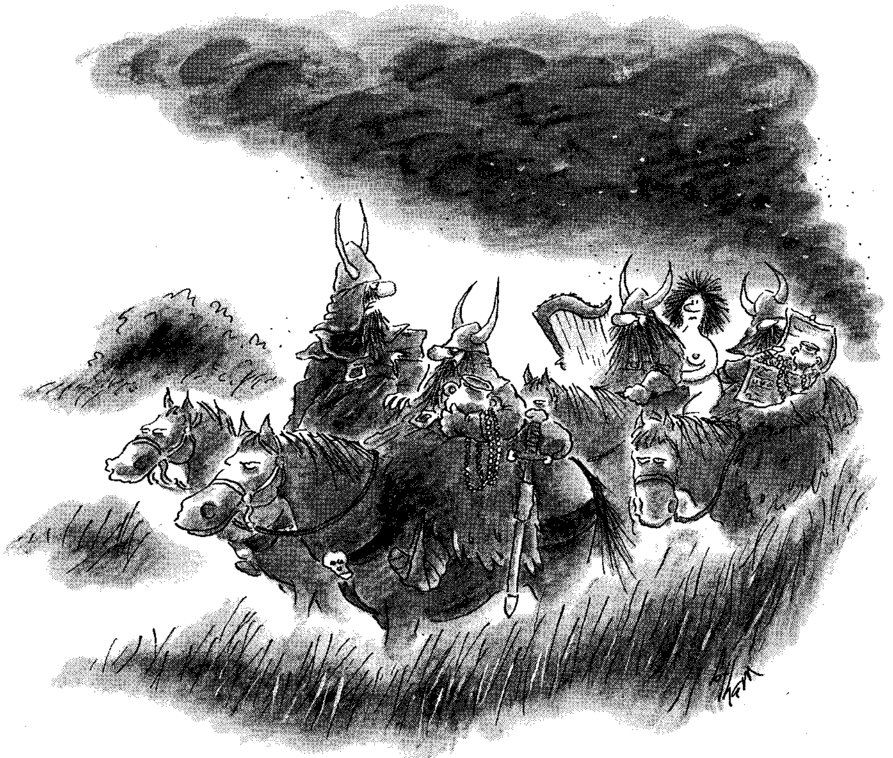
“He’s a little cocksucker,” Albrecht repeated, grinning openly now, partly at the free-associative force of Plepler’s tirade, and partly because the entire conversation bespoke a chesty pride, as if they were thinking, If this is all we have to worry about, we’re doing just fine.

And, on paper, HBO is indeed doing just fine. In 1999, the company won more Emmys than anyone else, and in 2000 it earned six hundred and twenty-six million dollars, roughly as much as the six broadcast networks combined. But this success has created palpable anxiety. HBO executives, worried about losing their spot at the top, often whisper to one another, “Remember ‘Must See TV’!” A few years ago, when NBC coined that slogan, its lineup seemed invincible, too; its huge lead has since evaporated.

When Home Box Office began, in 1972, it beamed a Vancouver-New York hockey game to three hundred and sixty-five underwhelmed subscribers in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, adding such delights as the Pennsylvania Polka Festival the following year. Live concerts were added in 1976, and five years later the channel went to twenty-four-hour programming, filling most of those hours with second-run movies. In 1983, HBO presented its first made-for-pay-TV movie. In 1986, its annual “Comic Relief” specials began. Today, HBO is in twenty-six million homes, and it airs almost a hundred uncut Hollywood movies a month (it just *seems* as if it’s always “Message in a Bottle”).

In the past five years, as people have been watching more movies on videocassette and DVD, HBO has relied increasingly on original programming to woo subscribers. “The Sopranos,” “Oz,” and “Sex and the City” have attracted sizable audiences. They have also shaken Hollywood’s dismissiveness about the dramatic possibilities of television at a time when the networks have been drifting toward inexpensive reality shows such as “Survivor” and “Temptation Island.” As Dean Valentine, the president of UPN, put it, “The networks have for the most part abandoned people with functional I.Q.s.”

Yet most network executives tend to belittle HBO, because it reaches only a quarter of the number of homes that the networks reach. Scott Sassa, the president of NBC West Coast, explained that HBO’s business model makes the channel different from the networks: “A broadcast network competes with other broadcast networks, and we need shows that draw a large audience that’s desirable to advertisers—the



“Did anyone plunder something good to read?”

eighteen-to-forty-nine demographic with high income and Internet usage. A pay-cable network like HBO is trying to fill a need for people who feel underserved by network television. It's not trying to get the biggest audience for a given show but to drive subscriptions with a bouquet of programs that eventually appeals to everyone in the household." HBO and the networks, however, do compete for the attention of high-income eighteen-to-forty-nine-year-olds; the networks acknowledge as much by accepting only "image" commercials that advertise HBO—and refusing to air ads that tell viewers when shows are on. When pressed, Sassa admitted, "Am I envious of HBO? Yes, I am."

Two weeks ago, Sassa's boss, Robert Wright, sent out a defensive-sounding letter to his fellow television executives in which he fretted about the disturbing success of "The Sopranos." NBC, he wrote, "could not and would not air" the show "because of the violence, language and nudity." Like a man facing a speeding locomotive, Wright asked his colleagues for counsel on how "mainstream entertainment and NBC in particular" should meet the threat.

Leslie Moonves, the president and C.E.O. of CBS Television, shares NBC's dismay. "I've got twenty-two hours of prime time to fill," Moonves said. "Our 'Yes, Dear' is the most critically unacclaimed show of the year, but it fits perfectly between 'King of Queens' and 'Everybody Loves Raymond,' on Monday nights. Do I rush home to see 'Yes, Dear'? No. But an awful lot of Americans watch it. I'd like to put on only what I think is terrific, but there aren't enough of those shows to fill all the time we've got. So you're envious of the small number of shows HBO has, the number of episodes in each show"—a season at HBO is only ten to eighteen episodes; the network season is roughly twenty-three—"and the way it's not a slave to ratings. Its economic model is so much better!"

Over lunch, Chris Albrecht maintained that the situation wasn't that simple. "Sure, we're only doing five shows now, the ones we're passionate about," he said. "But at least the network guys have a criterion for keeping shows on the air: Is it paying for itself? Whereas we just go, 'I dunno.' Because pay cable is sold by local cable operators, we haven't the faintest idea how many new subscriptions 'The Sopranos' has brought in. So we decide from the gut. Our theory is, Spend the cash now and hope that the shows drive more subscriptions, bringing in the money to pay for them later." Each new subscriber pays eleven or twelve dollars a month to his cable operator, of which HBO gets about five dollars. Albrecht made a scales-balancing gesture: "Should we spend a hundred and twenty million on 'Band of Brothers' "—a ten-part miniseries on the Normandy invasion, produced by Steven Spielberg and Tom Hanks, that will air in September—"or just send the money to the boys uptown?" He meant HBO's corporate parent, A.O.L. Time Warner.

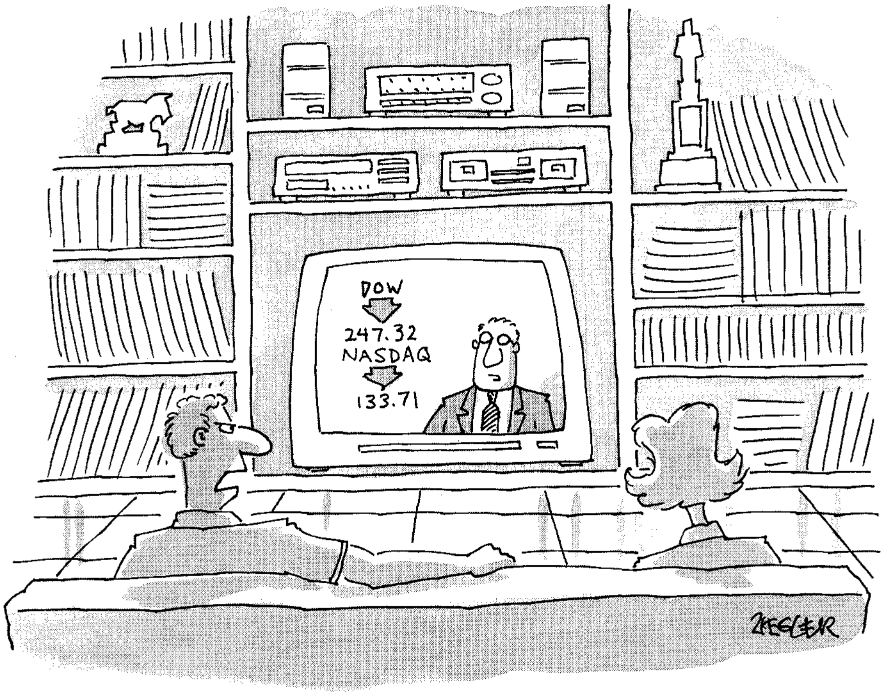
"If we started turning in three hundred million in profits instead of six hundred, we'd hear about it," Plepler said. "But now we're making money despite all the great programming."

"Despite?" Albrecht said. "Because of!"

The executives have been feeling apprehensive of potential corporate interference since Time Warner completed its merger with A.O.L. In February, HBO's chairman, Jeffrey Bewkes, told me that he was spending all his time persuading his new superiors that HBO's growth would continue only if it were spared the kind of layoffs and cutbacks that the company was instituting elsewhere. Even as Bewkes promised to increase his profit growth to more than twenty per cent, he bridled at the increased scrutiny. "It's such a great business, I wish we owned it ourselves," he said.

If HBO weren't prospering, its new corporate bosses might be perturbed by the channel's inability to measure how the popularity of individual shows affects subscriptions—a classic business-school case-study nightmare. As it is, HBO's operating theory is that a rising tide of acclaim lifts all boats. So, when Stephen Holden, of the *Times*, writes of "The Sopranos" that it "may be the greatest work of American popular culture of the last quarter century," it makes HBO subscribers feel good about their choice. It allows them to feel superior to all those clucks slumped in front of "Yes, Dear"—even if they never watch "The Sopranos" but instead slump in front of HBO's witless sitcom "Arliss" or some of the channel's cheesy sex programming.

Most executive producers at HBO don't bother to find out how many people watch their shows; at the networks, they all know. Indeed, they know at six o'clock each morning, when they dial a special network telephone number to hear a rundown of the previous night's Nielsen ratings. "My eyes pop open at 5:58 A.M.,"



"Well, I'm sure that Alan Greenspan's mother is very proud."

said Dick Wolf, the creator of NBC's "Law & Order" and "Law & Order: Special Victims Unit." "I'm in the broadcast business, and I feel infinitely more fulfilled the more people watch my show."

Wolf pointed out that networks are also where real money can be made. Alan Ball earns about one and a half million dollars a year for "Six Feet Under"; at a network he would probably make two million dollars for creating a drama or four million for a sitcom, with the big payoff coming five years later, when a program can be sold into syndication, often for hundreds of millions of dollars. HBO shows, because of their unwieldy lengths (the pilot of "Six Feet Under" runs sixty minutes, as opposed to the forty-one and a half minutes usually allotted a network "hour") and their raw language and content, have very little afterlife in syndication.

"The top writing talent, the David Kelleys and John Wellses, are drawn to broadcast television by the economics, and by the ego windfall of having a top-ten show," NBC's Scott Sassa told me. "If you're a great writer, you don't want to be the tallest midget on cable."

"Who gets the linguini with my thumb in it?"

• •

In mid-December, the cast of "Six Feet Under" gathered in a windowless basement room at the studio for the table read, or first rehearsal, of the fifth episode, which would be shot the following week. The script, written by Alan Ball, occasioned a lot of laughter. In this episode, the guest corpse is an aging porn star named Viveca; Claire Fisher and her mother snipe at each other; and David Fisher becomes a deacon at the family church, as his father had been.

After the read-through, Carolyn Strauss, HBO's senior vice-president of original programming, gave notes to the show's producers. (Besides Ball, these include the partners Bob Greenblatt and David Janollari, who have previously produced such sitcoms as "The Hughleys" and "Maggie Winters.") At the networks, notes on new shows tend to be formal and definitive: change this. Here the discussion was exploratory and conversational. Strauss, a lively, dark-haired woman in her mid-thirties, wearing bluejeans and sneakers, slouched in a chair.

"You could lose Scene 49," Strauss said, referring to a scene in which Claire talks to a guidance counsellor about her mother's depression and is advised to reach out to her. "It's all in the subtext, and to me Claire came to that conclusion herself."

"But Claire says that great thing about her mom, 'She's so fucking sad,' " David Janollari said.

"I'd prefer to see it played than articulated," Strauss said. Sensing mild opposition, she added, "We can always shoot it and lose it"—that is, cut it later.

"I have a question about why David is doing this deacon thing," Janollari said.

"Is he stepping into his dad's shoes?" Bob Greenblatt asked.

"He wants to be embraced by a bedrock organization," Ball explained.

Strauss said, "When I read it, I didn't think Father Jack"—the young minister, played by Tim Maculan—"was gay, but today Tim played it very, um—"

"Gay, gay, gay," Janollari said.

"—and so I wondered if David wasn't attracted to him," Strauss said.

Ball looked horrified: some line had been crossed that shouldn't be, even at HBO. Father Jack might well *be* gay, but Ball doesn't want him to seem twittery or sexually predatory. "No!" he said. "That was just Tim playing around, and we'll tone him down. I don't want the audience to even think we're going there."

"Cool," Strauss said. "And maybe there was one too many Viveca funeral scenes." And that, after five minutes, was that.

In 1999, Ball created a sitcom called "Oh, Grow Up," about three guys living in a house in Brooklyn. It was not a happy experience. When Ball pitched the concept to Warren Littlefield, at NBC, Littlefield said, "I love it! I just have two notes: can we make the gay character straight, and can we set it in the suburbs instead of the city?" Ball told me that during his meeting with Littlefield he couldn't help noticing a leather plaque on his desk inscribed, "It's the writing, stupid." (Dick Wolf had given a plaque to each of the industry's top executives. "They all *displayed* it," he said.)

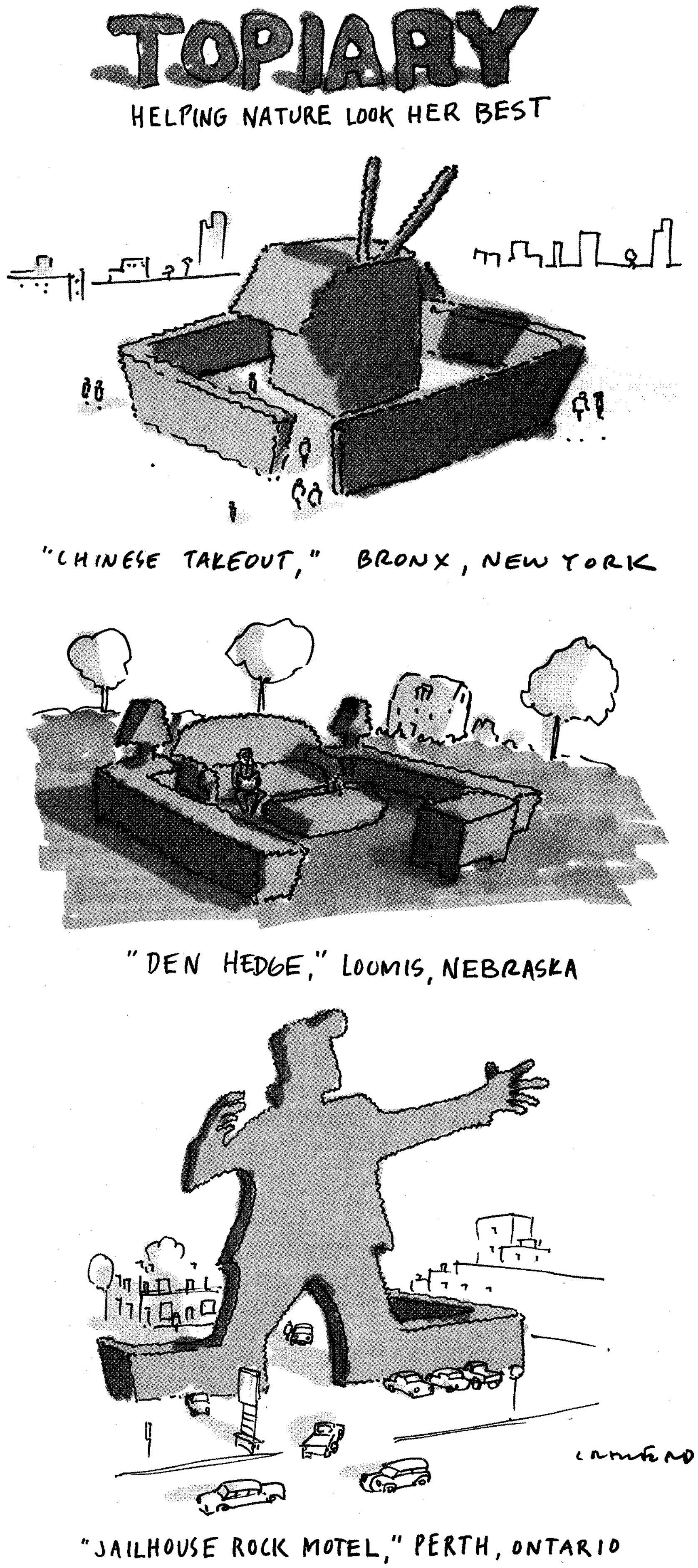
ABC bought "Oh, Grow Up" and aired it in the fall of 1999. "In the second episode, Ford, the gay guy who'd left his wife, became president of the house," Ball said, "and he started becoming a tyrant, because he was upset that his wife didn't seem as emotionally devastated as he was. It was your basic stupid-sitcom plot. But the guys at ABC said, 'We don't understand why Ford is behaving that way.' I said, 'Well, it's pretty clear—do we have to spoon-feed it?' They said, 'Yes.' And I thought, Wow! Bad Writing 101! After a while, you realize that all network notes can be reduced to: one, make everybody nicer, remove all the conflict; and, two, articulate the subtext, have somebody state what's going on. But drama *is* conflict and subtext."

Ball's first writing job in television, in 1994, was on ABC's hit blue-collar comedy "Grace Under Fire." Ball was new in town, a transplanted Manhattan playwright. "It turned out to be the best first TV job I could have had, because it was the worst I could have had," he said. At a "room-written" sitcom such as "Grace," the writers spend hours "punching up" the script, line by line. Ball's friend Michael Patrick King, the executive producer of "Sex and the City," says, "All across Hollywood at 2 A.M. every night, some guy who hates his wife and has to make his Jaguar payments is angrily flipping through the script: 'Top of page 3—anyone got anything?' "

Ball next wrote for CBS's "Cybill," on which the writers began each story session by asking, "What's the 'Moment of Shit'?"—the big hug or weepy speech that would conclude the episode, when a character reveals something painful and Cybill Shepherd is wise and forgiving. Ball kept trying to quit, but he was soon running the show. "They backed the money truck up to my house," he said wearily, "more than twenty thousand dollars a week, and I thought, Well, I'll be a whore and bank the money for when I write my screenplay. At night, I would pour all my rage and frustration into 'American Beauty.' It was passionate writing, the way I used to write before it became a job. It saved me."

In October, 1999, Carolyn Strauss took Ball to lunch. She had just seen and admired "American Beauty." She had also heard that Ball was floundering at ABC. Strauss told him that she had recently read "The American Way of Death Revisited," Jessica Mitford's update of her classic exposé of the mortuary business, and watched the film based on "The Loved One," Evelyn Waugh's comic novel about Hollywood funerals. She said that she wanted to do a show about a family that runs a funeral home.

When ABC cancelled "Oh, Grow Up," just before Christmas (making room for "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire"), Alan Ball stopped at a Barnes &


TOPIARY
HELPING NATURE LOOK HER BEST
"CHINESE TAKEOUT," BRONX, NEW YORK
"DEN HEDGE," LOOMIS, NEBRASKA
CRAWFORD
"JAILHOUSE ROCK MOTEL," PERTH, ONTARIO

Noble in Atlanta, on his way home for the holidays, and bought Mitford's book. In his mother's house, in Marietta, Georgia, Ball read the book and brooded for days—and then, suddenly, a pilot script for "Six Feet Under" came tumbling out.

"When I go home, it always churns up stuff," Ball said. He was the youngest of four children, and when he was thirteen his sister, Mary Ann, died in a car accident on her twenty-second birthday. She was driving Alan to his piano lesson. At a blind intersection, another car rammed her Pinto on the driver's side (the same way the bus rams Nathaniel Fisher in the pilot of "Six Feet Under"). Alan suffered only a bump on the leg. "It was a tremendously traumatic experience that I didn't deal with for twenty years, when I found myself breaking into tears on the subway," Ball said. "At the funeral, my mom kissed my sister and started to break down, and someone from the funeral home swooped in and led her off behind a drape—that went right into the pilot. I remember looking at my sister in the casket and thinking, She would never wear that color lipstick, that's not her—what is that? They wanted me to kiss her forehead, and I was thinking, Don't make me! Don't make me!"

After a minute, he continued, "There's part of me in all the Fisher kids: Nate, the Peter Pan guy who left home and who has a huge fear of death. And David: I have his need to be the good boy and I had all of his shame and self-loathing. It took me until I was thirty-three to come out of the closet. And I relate to Claire, the afterthought child, because as a teen-ager I was basically living in a house of ghosts."

One day early last February, Strauss, to her surprise, received Ball's script. The next morning, she and her boss Chris Albrecht called the production company run by Greenblatt and Janollari, which had Ball under contract, to say that they wanted to make a pilot. "We said, 'This is Alan Ball—it's got to be more than a pilot,' " Bob Greenblatt told me, savoring the memory of his cunning in scheduling the script's arrival for the day after Ball received his Oscar nomination.

HBO finally agreed to order a whole series, pending the delivery of a satisfactory pilot episode. (Albrecht says he was "scared shitless" about that, because Ball, a novice behind the camera, insisted on directing.) The agreement also authorized Ball to hire his own writing staff. After the pilot script was sent out to the talent agencies, dozens of frustrated network writers sent in résumés.

Among the most eager was Christian Williams, who, after working on "Hill Street Blues," had created the hit swords-and-sandals drama "Hercules: The Legendary Journeys." Williams, who is in his fifties, became Ball's oldest and best-dressed writer; he comes to the office in houndstooth sports coats and tasselled loafers. His accepted role on the staff—which otherwise consists mainly of playwrights—is the jaded TV veteran, the guy who keeps moaning that "Six Feet Under" episodes are too psychological: "Where the fuck is the *story*?" Yet Williams told me, "The finest achievement I've had so far on television is to recycle cop shows. But on this show I have to find the loathing instead of the caramel, the death instead of the happy face—the fear deep inside."

In mid-February, before signing a deal with Ball, HBO brought him in for a meeting. Ball, Greenblatt, and Janollari sat on a leather couch in Albrecht's office, with Albrecht, Strauss, and Strauss's deputy, Miranda Heller, sitting across from them at a table covered with Evian bottles. At the networks, this first notes meeting is one that producers particularly dread. "You feel like you're stepping onto the gallows," Greenblatt said. "I didn't hate it" is the classic network note: it sounds self-assured, is completely unhelpful, and allows a lot of wiggle room should the boss have a firm opinion. Network executives often arrive with fifty color-coded paper clips attached to their copies of the script, each marking a moment where the material should be smoothed or rounded.

The session was brief. After a few words of praise, Carolyn Strauss said she felt that Ball's characters were too articulate and yet also too muffled and safe. "Could you make it more fucked up?" she asked. Ball's eyes widened. Miranda Heller suggested that Ball could go a little deeper after Nate, at his father's grave, refuses to use the "earth shaker" offered by the minister to sprinkle dirt on the coffin and instead throws it by the fistful. "Hang a light on the fact that he's being a prick," Heller said. And Chris Albrecht didn't like the ending, when the father's will was read, revealing that the business was left equally to both sons. "That's a network lock," he said. "It's 'Oh, my God—they're going to be stuck together!' Find a harder, more honest reason for Nate to stay around."

Ball says he left the meeting thinking, God, I've become a hack! Without realizing it, he had followed many of the schematic network conventions for hour-long drama. These are: Have a teaser preceding your four acts, a quick shock that grabs the audience. The most urgent story line should be made clear within five minutes, and each "act-out" moment before a commercial should be a cliff-hanger or an emotional crisis. ("I'm having a heart attack"; "You're pregnant?") The most important act-out is at the half-hour (when viewers could switch to another network); the second most important is at the quarter-hour. Underlying these rules is a single anxiety: Don't touch that remote!

Until 1981, standard dramas such as "Little House on the Prairie" had a big A story and a small B story that wrapped up at the end. The arrival of "Hill Street Blues" that year ushered in today's ensemble dramas, like "E.R." and "The West Wing," which are filmed with more fluid, prowling Steadicam shots, and feature interwoven A and B and C and sometimes even D and E stories of nearly equal weight, many of which arc across three or four episodes.

But the A story still drives toward an emotional payoff. Dick Wolf said, "During the sixth season of 'Law & Order,' Don Ohlmeyer"—who preceded Scott Sassa at NBC—"gave me the best network note I've ever had. He said, 'Watching your show is like watching Christiaan Barnard perform heart surgery: beautiful, but antiseptic. Put my kid on the table, and the show runs forever.' Since then, we've added an eyedropperful more—one scene more—of the wife of the victim, parents of the victim, being told about the death. It raises the stakes to see people break down. And our ratings went straight up."

To make the emotional spine of the story unmistakable, a network drama often features one character asking another, "How are you feeling?" An articulate speech then clarifies exactly what's going on. In a recent episode of "Ally McBeal," the act-out before the third commercial break was a conversation between the lawyer John Cage and his aging mentor Nicholas Engbloom, whose reluctance to retire and be at home with his wife made her seek a divorce. She had just had a heart attack and was asleep in the hospital bed in front of them:

NICHOLAS

This is my real fear, John—if I'm at home all day, she'll finally figure out that I'm not good enough for her . . .

JOHN

She's not going to stop loving you, Nicholas.

NICHOLAS

Every trial I ever won, I won for the client—but I also won for her.

JOHN

Well, why don't you tell her that when she wakes up?

Good idea.

After getting HBO's notes, Alan Ball rewrote the "Six Feet Under" pilot and broke many of the golden rules of network television: He muddied the structure with flashbacks so it was harder to distinguish the A story from the B and C stories. He made his characters angrier and more dangerous, less open to on-camera psychobabble. He moved the reading of the will to the second episode, and he rewrote the funeral scene so that David confronts Nate afterward:

DAVID

You want to get your hands dirty? You sanctimonious prick. Talk to me when you've had to stuff formaldehyde-soaked cotton up your father's ass so he won't leak.

NATE

[Totally skeeved] Jesus.

Ball delivered his rough cut of the pilot on a Friday in September. On Monday morning, Albrecht called Greenblatt and Janollari and said, "You've got a series." Unlike the broadcast networks, which test pilots with focus groups, HBO made this thirty-million-dollar decision by itself. (The last time it paid attention to audience research was when Albrecht told David Chase, the creator of "The Sopranos," that the show's title confused viewers, and should be changed to the double-entendre "Family Man." Chase said, "Hmm . . . No.") And, unlike the networks, which will cancel a show after two episodes if the ratings are low, HBO is prepared to be patient. Albrecht said, "With a dark, ironic show like this, unless it's a creative or critical disaster you've almost got to give it two years for it to have a chance to build an audience."

In its self-conscious quest to be different, HBO and its writers regularly dare each other into fresh, and sometimes questionable, territory. Tom Fontana, who created "Oz" for HBO after years of writing for such shows as "St. Elsewhere," says, "Every time I'd fall into my bad broadcast habits, wanting to be loved, Chris and Carolyn would remind me to be unafraid of being reviled." Fontana responded with a scene that so shocked Miranda Heller when she watched it in dailies that her shrieks brought colleagues on the run: a convict demands a blow job from a cellmate named Beecher; Beecher seems to comply, then bites off the end of the man's penis. But that's not what made Heller scream. Grinning, Fontana told me, "Later, you see Beecher open his mouth and"—he mimed spitting out the tip of a penis (in fact, a chunk of hot dog). "They didn't tell me to cut it!"

Even HBO, though, isn't immune to the laws of conventional television. During the first season of "The Sopranos," a scuffle ensued over a script in which Tony Soprano, in the course of driving his teen-age daughter to visit colleges, strangles a Mob informant with a piece of cord. Chris Albrecht remonstrated with David Chase, saying, "You've created one of the most interesting, charismatic leading men of the last twenty years, but the show's not even on the air yet and you're going to destroy him!"

Chase replied, "No, Tony's going to be destroyed unless we do this—he won't

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LET'S GO OVER IT ALL AGAIN

Some people are like that.
They split up and then they think:
Hey, maybe we haven't hurt each other to the uttermost.
Let's meet up and have a drink.

Let's go over it all again.
Let's rake over the dirt.
Let me pick that scab of yours.
Does it hurt?

Let's go over what went wrong—
How and why and when.
Let's go over what went wrong
Again and again.

We hurt each other badly once.
We said a lot of nasty stuff.
But lately I've been thinking how
I didn't hurt you enough.

Maybe there's more where that came from,
Something more malign.
Let me damage you again
For the sake of auld lang syne.

Yes, let me see you bleed again
For the sake of auld lang syne.

—*James Fenton*

be a credible Mob underboss." After a lot of arguing, Chase retooled the script to make it clear that the victim was a drug dealer, and that Tony's code left him no option. The murder stayed in, and the episode became a classic. Chase told me, "If HBO had said Tony can't kill, I would have had to leave the show."

A network leading man could never be an unrepentant killer. Scott Sassa says, "To get a mass audience, network shows have to be about heroes and wish fulfillment. 'The Practice' has the lawyers you'd want defending you; 'E.R.' has the doctors you'd want treating you; and 'Law & Order' has the guys you'd want trying to solve your case." By contrast, in real life you would not want to meet Tony Soprano (he'd break your thumbs), the prisoners in "Oz" (you'd be dead—or castrated—within a week), or the Fisher family (someone you loved would already be dead).

Not every writer feels that it is necessary to break the rules in order to make good television. "If 'The West Wing' were on HBO," the show's creator, Aaron Sorkin, said, "it would be a better show, because President Bartlet could say 'Fuck' during a tirade. On HBO, we probably wouldn't have cast someone as handsome as Rob Lowe, and the hooker he gets together with wouldn't be a Georgetown law student with a heart of gold but a hundred-and-fifty-dollar hooker from the phone book. But I tend not to write like that." Similarly, Dick Wolf told me, "I don't need to say 'Fuck' or show Jerry Orbach's butt to communicate the best parts of 'Law & Order'—and a vast percentage of the audience doesn't want to hear it."

In a courtyard beside St. James Church in the mid-Wilshire district of Los Angeles, Kathy Bates, the Academy Award-winning actress, walked across the flagstones to confer with Frances Conroy, the actress who plays the Fishers' mother, Ruth. It was the middle of December, and Bates was directing the fifth episode of "Six Feet Under": in this scene, David has just been made a deacon and everyone is filing out of the church. Claire asks her mother what she's doing the following night. Ruth says, "Nothing as far as I know. Why?" Claire murmurs, "I thought you might want to go see a movie." It's the beginning, perhaps, of a tentatively touchy-feely mother-daughter relationship, and Bates wanted the moment to feel pivotal: "Think of 'Nothing' as what it really means," she suggested.

Peter Krause, who played Casey McCall on ABC's "Sports Night," was sitting in a chair nearby. He said that on network sitcoms he was always told, "Say it louder, say it faster, say it smiling." But playing Nate Fisher, he said, was a daily memento mori: "I find myself thinking that we're all just waiting in the graveyard, and headstones are our future." He shook himself like a dog that has just jumped out of a cold stream. "This kind of job is the reason I became an actor."

Rachel Griffiths, who plays Nate's girlfriend, Brenda, rattled her *Times* derisively in the adjoining chair. "The reason I'm here is the catering's excellent," she said. Krause gave her a wary smile.

Griffiths, who made her name playing Hilary du Pré in the film "Hilary and Jackie," and Krause both have movie-star good looks, and their presence in the cast indicates the pressure on HBO to attract an audience in some of the conventional ways. Chris Albrecht had rejected his subordinates' less glossy candidates for the roles of Nate and Brenda. His underlying concern was that "Six Feet Under" doesn't have a lot of commercial shimmer, or much of what he calls "the TV part." He said, "On 'The Sopranos,' the Mob stuff is the TV part that makes you tune in. In 'Sex and the City,' the TV part is New York City—if you set it in Iowa, no one would care. The TV part here is *death:* holy shit, Dad died. The death of an archetypal figure—death of a king." He waved his arms. "That's huge. But is there a way to market it that's not going to make people want to shoot themselves?"

"Six Feet Under" will air Sunday nights at ten o'clock. By running the show in the summer, when the competition is weaker, and by starting it right after a season-opening double episode of "Sex and the City," HBO hopes to get a six or seven rating for the première of the first episode. That's about one and a half million households, or roughly a sixth of the audience for "The West Wing." "At least when 'West Wing' creams us, it'll be all in the family," Albrecht said wryly. "The West Wing" is produced by Warner Bros. Television, another branch of the A.O.L. Time Warner empire, and Albrecht's remark is a reminder that HBO is not a band of artistic guerrillas who occasionally hijack the airwaves but an élite alternative to the parent company's mass-market brands.

Because HBO likes to be seen as a grassroots phenomenon, though, the network plans to sell "Six Feet Under" by word of mouth. The company has arranged preview screenings of the show in Los Angeles and New York, to which

"I write astronaut banter for NASA."

it invited well-placed cultural observers such as Maureen Dowd, of the *Times*, Roger Rosenblatt, of *Time*, and Kurt Andersen, of Inside.com. "We can't spend enough money, or create enough image shit, to make 'Six Feet Under' a phenomenon," Richard Plepler said. "People will come to the show because these 'cultural interpreters' say, 'Whoa!' If that group gets churning early, and the Shaleses get excited"—Tom Shales is the television critic at the Washington *Post*—"that then catalyzes Page Six and the gossip columns, and then it's viral." Unless, of course, the cultural interpreters don't like it.

The most watched original series on HBO is "The Sopranos." After that, the channel's highest-rated programming includes boxing and "Real Sex," a series of documentaries on such topics as blowup dolls and Dutch swingers. Yet nobody at HBO ever started a discussion with me about boxing or blowup dolls, attractions that are hardly unique to the channel. HBO executives would rather discuss its riskier, artier ventures, emphasizing just how different it is—some of the time, anyway.

One winter day, I went to HBO's New York headquarters and talked with Jeffrey Bewkes, the channel's chairman and C.E.O. He told me, "Last year, when we did 'The Corner' "—a cheerless miniseries about drug addicts in Baltimore—"we made it very realistic. So we had a lot of problems: Who's going to watch this? How do you tell people what this is?" Bewkes is a rangy man with brush-cut gray hair and a lively mind. "If you tell them what this really is, do you drive them away?" he said. "And, if you drive them away, do you care?"

He continued, "Is everybody going to watch a miniseries about drug addiction in the inner city? No. But if fifteen per cent of our subscribers watched it over our multiple airings, and another project drew thirty-five per cent, would we choose the latter? Flat answer: no. Especially if we've already got stuff that's appealing to those thirty-five per cent—let's say they're already watching 'G-String Divas' or our kung-fu movies on Friday night."

When I said that a number of network executives had told me that "The Sopranos" couldn't be a hit on a network, Bewkes became annoyed.

"Our philosophy is not to do shows that would be network hits," Bewkes said. "But, in fact, if you take the cumulative rating of all four weekly showings of 'The Sopranos,' which is all we care about, because we don't care *when* our subscribers watch, it's a thirty or thirty-five rating"—eight million households—"and that beats most network shows." Then, referring to CBS Television's president, Leslie Moonves, he went on, "O.K., Les, put 'The Sopranos' on *your* network and promote it with all your free ads, and you'd have more than twenty million households viewing and a huge commercial hit—we both know that!"

I mentioned that Moonves had told me, "A company that uses the slogan 'It's Not TV. It's HBO' shouldn't be winning Emmy Awards. They should be winning something else."

"It's a tag line," Richard Plepler, who had joined us, muttered. "Get a life. Jesus."

"Does he think we have legally disqualified ourselves?" Bewkes asked, amused. "That we are morally obligated to withdraw?"

"It's a *tag line!*" Plepler repeated.

"Tell Les," Bewkes said, with elaborate patience, "that we were trying to create a vague idea that we were different from regular TV."

Because there are no real secrets in television—to learn what your competition is doing, you just turn on the set—that difference can vanish fast. Scott Sassa told me, "The big lesson from cable is that people will watch what they want because they have choices, so you increasingly need to aim for a niche. For example, with our show 'Providence,' in the past we would have said, 'It's a woman's show, so let's tweak it to bring in some men, and children, and dogs,' but this time we said, 'O.K., let's just get women.' We've learned from cable not to try to be all things to all people." Borrowing further from HBO's model, NBC is contemplating a sitcom starring Julia Louis-Dreyfus, which would have only fifteen episodes per season.

"What do we do if the networks start coming to our oasis?" Bewkes mused, looking out the window of the executive dining room. He knew that HBO's success has come from trying to be all things to all people—but not all at once. For now, the strategy is working. So he said, simply, "We ask Alan Ball to do a show that no network would ever do. The networks can imitate us in going offbeat and more real, but large audiences like theirs don't want to go somewhere difficult."

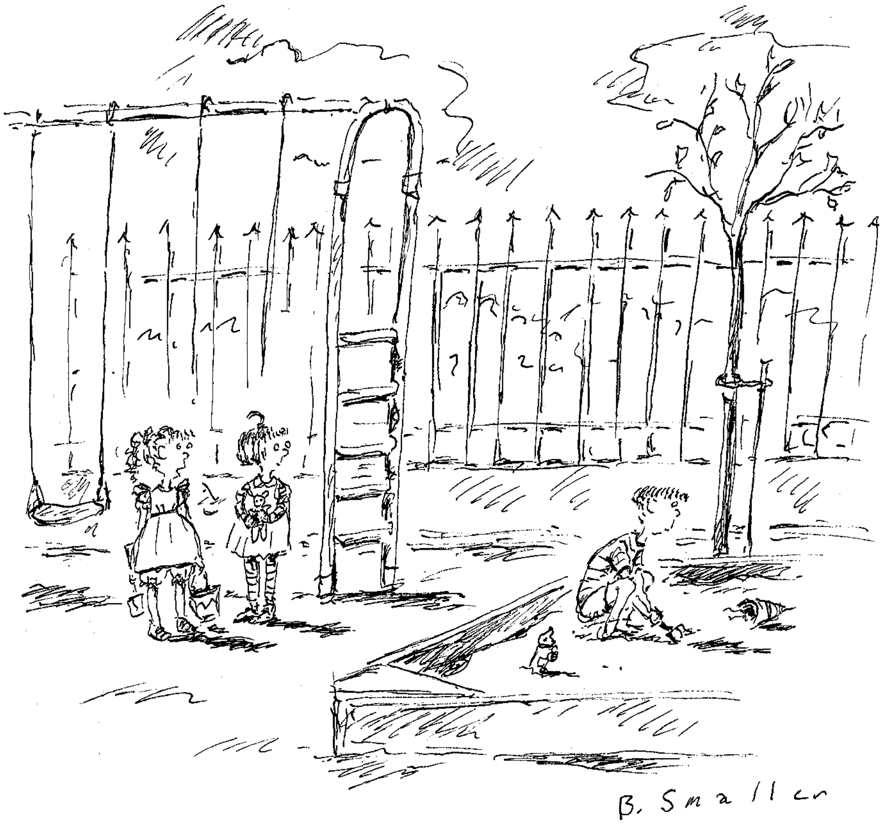
"A full menu of that would not make Procter & Gamble happy," Plepler said.

"The truth is," Bewkes said, "if we did nasty, dark, difficult shit *all* the time, nobody would watch us, either."

Alan Ball lounged on a white couch in an editing bay at Sunset Gower Studios with his co-executive producer, Alan Poul, beside him. Elsewhere in the studio, Christian Williams was writing the seventh episode, and Kathy Bates was directing the fifth. Ball and Poul, for their part, were still editing the third. Michael Ruscio, one of the show's three editors, called up the episode on a monitor.

"The new idea is no cold open," Ball explained to Ruscio. "The person of the week will now bite it *after* the credits." Starting each episode with the guest death had initially struck Ball as a clever innovation. Then one of the show's editors said, "Oh, like 'Columbo'?" And HBO told Ball that the "cold open" seemed too much like a quirky network teaser—like "Ally McBeal."

Reinventing television is not so easy. Like a forty-niner crossing the supposedly wide-open West, the human imagination seems to fall all too readily into the wagon ruts of those who've gone before. The joke on the set of the pilot was that Nate, the innocent among the kooks, was like Marilyn on "The Munsters." And Ball's log line for "Six Feet Under" has become " 'Knots Landing' in a funeral home." Without precisely intending to do so, Ball has reinvigorated an old television fixture: the franchise show. Franchise shows take place



"I hear his allowance is in the two figures."

in a setting—a hospital, a law firm, a police station—that is a home to all walks of life. The wide range of guest stars appeals, in theory, to a range of audiences. "Six Feet Under" ushers through the Fishers' world a motley fellowship of the bereaved which includes porn actors, Latino gangbangers, Gulf War veterans—and, as it happens, a ruminative old black man—and establishes the unappealing truth that everyone will eventually die. At the networks, it has been established only that everyone will eventually be cancelled.

Ball and Poul were editing a passage in which Nate, hoping to sell the family business, meets with an executive at a funeral-home conglomerate. Both producers winced when a secretary walked into the scene carrying Nate's first payment. A young woman with "Flashdance" hair, she held out the check with a blinding smile: this was her moment. "Can we try it without her?" Ball asked. "Because she's, like, from a completely different series."

" 'Providence,' " Poul suggested.

"A *telenovela*," Ball said, referring to Hispanic soap operas. With a few keystrokes, Ruscio erased the secretary from the show. But, as they scrutinized the next scene, Ball was still brooding about her. He said, "She'll have a huge party with all her friends to watch this episode."

"And she no longer exists."

"Where is she now—in some alternate TV universe where edited people go?" Poul shook his head. "Where does everyone go when they're no longer on the screen?"

One building to the south, Christian Williams sat at his desk, frowning at his script for the seventh episode. In the scene in front of him, Nate is worried that he smells of formaldehyde; Brenda sniffs him and says, "You smell fine. Your life stinks." Williams was concerned that it sounded too glib. Alan Ball heavily edits every script, and he ultimately ended up rewriting this one, too, making it nimbler, funnier, and less earnest. Where Williams has the guidance counsellor try to buck Claire up by saying, "So ride the horse, kid. I'm rootin' for you," Ball revised it so that Claire sees him—in a fantasy sequence—wearing a child's cowboy hat and saying, in a goofy, twangy voice, "I'm rootin' for ya, Claire! Whee-doggies! Yee-hah!" "Alan took my melodrama and made it his magic realism," Williams said later. One line that remained intact after the rewrite was "You smell fine. Your life stinks."

Ball had reminded Williams to have the characters embody their feelings, rather than describe them. But he was finding it slow, painful work. "I'm doing this show because . . . because I'm afraid," Williams said. "Because I'm not sure I can."

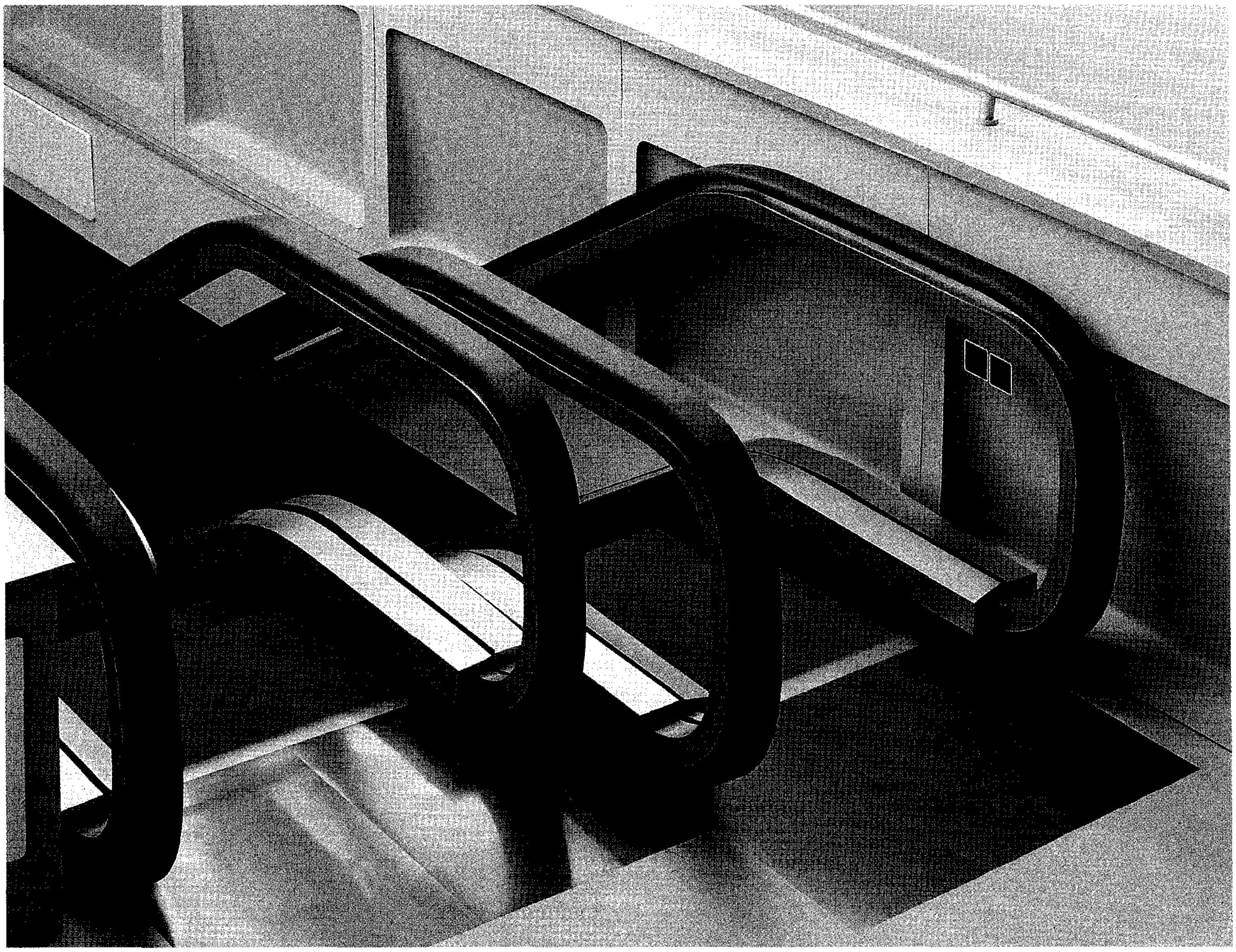
He went and stood by the window. The late-afternoon sun beat down on the Hollywood sign, on the hillside above him. "What's really different out here is the weather," he said. "The fucking weather! It's not a contemplative climate. Yet the fuel for all this glossy entertainment is dissatisfaction—TV writers are the most dissatisfied people I know. What are my problems? Which yacht to enter in a race?" He added, almost under his breath, "I think I wasted my life, actually."

Williams crossed the room and leaned his head against the far wall. "The great danger of this show is that people won't watch. 'Six Feet Under' is not entertainment, so it better be good. On this show, we're oncologists: what do we say about this condition in which everyone is dying? Television is Mediterranean-Jewish—the emotive, the operatic—while the Fishers are like me, Episcopalians who don't express much. Yet more and more our story points are 'I don't want to be alone' and 'I love you.' It's kind of cool!" He walked, head down. "But is that life, or is that television?

"Then you write it," he continued, after a moment, "and Alan rewrites it and the director and the actors take it and you see the dailies and it's never quite what you thought. It's a paper moon." He stopped and burst out, "There's nothing wrong with this setup! If this show isn't a success, everything we all always say about television being no good because of network interference is wrong. We have this big fucking opportunity, and we're mortal! We're not Shakespeare! At the very least, we should be Steinbeck! But . . . we're not." He sat down at his desk and, as the daylight waned, began to work again. ♦

IN THE BED DEPARTMENT

BY ANNE ENRIGHT



Kitty was suspicious of the escalator, or, more properly, the escalators, as there were two of them, one falling and one rising, anchored side by side in the middle of the main shopping floor. She disliked the push of the motor, and, under that, the light clacking sound of something she could not analyze. A chain perhaps, that ran loose, deep in the machine.

They were new. The space where they appeared had been boxed in for months, floor to ceiling, with cheap wooden panelling, painted blue. First, a hole was knocked in the floor, and then another in the ceiling above, she supposed. They worked at night, but even during the day men came out from behind the panelling, filthy and smiling, and went back in again: ordinary Dublin men who worked whenever, and installed escalators in the middle of the night. She wondered how much they were paid.

Kitty tried to take to them, but she couldn't. She was disturbed by the sight of them out among the merchandise. She disliked the way they talked to each other loudly and laughed as if they owned the shop. They interrupted the conversation, somehow. You'd be selling a bed, talking about springs, you'd be with a young couple, pushing into the mattress in a cozy sort of way, and who would stroll past but the lean blond one, maybe, with the dirty-looking tan, adjusting his zip on the way back from the loo.

Not that she minded men. She had two grown sons at home, so she was used to it: the cheerfulness, the indifference, and the mess. Though sometimes she turned around in the kitchen and was shocked by the sheer size of them—all that protein and carbohydrate, the muscle and milk of them, as though she had fed a couple of potted plants, and grown triffids.

Then, one morning, she walked in and the men were gone. The place was perfect; the carpets fresh and new, the hoarding dissolved into thin air, and, in the middle of the floor, a pair of escalators, one going up and the other coming down. The steps tugged lightly at each other as they passed, snagging and loosening all day long. They ticked in the corner of her eye, making her feel balanced, or dizzy, depending on the light. They were so clean. The up escalator always mounting itself, stair over stair; the down escalator falling like syrup, burying itself slowly in the flatness of the floor.

They were beautiful, and they never stopped, and finally they got on her nerves. Nothing happened in the Bed Department. People bought a bed, or they did not buy a bed. Kitty used to like the open space, the hummocky slabs of mattress, the headboards like tombstones in a giant graveyard. "Who's been sleeping in *my* bed?" But all her satisfaction was gone now. The way people lay down and curled up, in the middle of the crowd. The old couples sitting on either side of the mattress and looking over their shoulders at each other in a way that was almost coy; the giggles and the silences. Most people buying a bed were in love, she used to think, or hopeful at least of finding love. Now they just bounced up and down or put their dirty feet up or looked like they could kill for a decent night's sleep.

She was at home one evening, washing the dishes, when the phone rang. It was a young man who said he was looking for a Kevin Daly. Kitty was listed as K. Daly in the phone book, and she didn't want to give too much away. She said that there was no Kevin Daly at that number, and the young man asked if she was sure. He said that he was looking for a Kevin Daly he used to know, a man who had gone to school in Malahide. "I'm sorry," Kitty said, but they were talking to each other now. He told her that Kevin Daly was his brother, long out of touch. Then he said that Kevin Daly was actually his father, but that he did not know he was his father, or he did not know that *he* was his son. He said that he was looking for his father because his mother was sick and that was why she had given him his father's name, finally—Kevin Daly, and the fact that he'd gone to school in Malahide. "It was a schooltime romance," he said. Kitty just said "Sorry" a lot, the way you might say "I see."

"Sorry," she said.

"So that's why—you know?"

"I'm sorry."

He asked did she have a brother called Kevin Daly, or a cousin, and she just said, "No, sorry." But he was quite insistent, as though she might be harboring the man. "No really, I'm sorry," she said, and put down the phone.

The next day, Kitty expected someone to float down the escalator into the Bed Department and call her by name. She did not know who it might be. A girl, maybe, with green eyes, or a slender young boy. She imagined a man in a perfect black suit—something extra about him, anyway, like Cary Grant. A young man with curly red hair gazed at her—or through her—all the way from the floor above, and she wondered, bizarrely, if he was the person she was waiting for. Also what he might say to her, if he was.

Then a figure did appear that made her heart turn, and it took a while before Kitty realized that it was her own mother, sailing down from Fabrics and Soft Furnishings like a queen.

"I didn't recognize you," Kitty said.

Her mother was in town looking for a shower curtain and had thought she would pop in to say hello. But after that there was little enough to talk about. Kitty was used to seeing her at home; out in the open, she seemed surprisingly well dressed and mute.

"Well, you always know where to find me," Kitty said to her, with a stranger's smile.

Kitty ended up seducing a man from the local Drama Society, a little to his surprise. He had been courting her for months, but in an old-fashioned sort of way. He was sixty-plus, and Kitty was forty-plus; that was the kind of age gap you could expect, with two nearly grown sons. They were both in a production of "Johnny Belinda," a play about a deaf-mute who gets pregnant, though it comes out right in the end. Kitty did the interval coffees and had a walk-on in the final scene; Tom, for that was the man's name, did the set. He was good with his hands, he said, as he bent over a sawhorse in the scene dock, and Kitty flicked a glance at him to see what he meant—but all he meant was that he was good at making things. Nice. In a way. He drove her home after rehearsal most nights, and one evening they stopped out to eat. After which, Kitty asked him in for a drink.

Tom. He said all he needed was a couple of hours to fit two dimmers where the old light switch was, but she'd need to redecorate, after. He looked at the photos on her mantelpiece. He was recently bereaved. His daughter had told him to join the Drama Society, so there he was. In a moment, Kitty thought, he would tell her about his teeth, that they were all his own. Faded brown eyes, silver hair, a handsome where-did-it-all-go-wrong face. They were on the sofa, safe enough. Kitty's older son lumbered in from the pub, and stayed to be introduced. Her younger one was upstairs with his own TV. They were nice boys. They did not expect their mother to seduce old geezers in the front room, and neither did the geezer. It was awkward all the way through, and quite satisfying. Kitty did not tell him about her ex-husband, as he did not talk about his dead wife. She did not tell him that her husband had strayed, that she had done everything to keep him, up to and including porn videos in the bedroom, and that, when she finally left, the judge held that desertion against her and awarded him the house. She did not tell him how her husband had moved a woman in, two weeks after walking out of court. She did not tell him how the boys had followed her eventually to her bedsit and looked after her, as only young boys can, how together they had made their way here, to the outer suburbs and a decent life. Nor did she tell him that she was pregnant, when she realized that she was pregnant. She just let him, and the Drama Society, lapse, soon after the curtain had rung down on "Johnny Belinda," and before anyone could be surprised.

At first, she thought it was the change of life. She stood in the Bed Department and waited for hot flashes. She did not mind growing old as long as it meant growing easy, but it did not seem to be working out that way. There was an agitation, a turbulence in her blood. She rode all the way up to Accounts to query her pay slip, and she landed back down in the Bed Department with a thump. She walked the floor and sat on the beds. She had a terrible need to lie down on one of them. One Monday evening, during stocktaking, she actually did lie down. She simply reclined. She let her back sink

THOMAS DEMAND, "ESCALATOR" 35MM FILM PROJECTION (2001)/VG BILD KUNST, BONN

into a double-sprung Slumberland, and felt she might never rise again.

It was not until she bought three pots of apricot jam that the penny dropped. She did not even bother to take a test. She felt that swooping blankness she had felt with each of the boys, so delicious, like diving into a pool and finding you can breathe. The child was no bigger than a pip in the flesh of her stomach. She took it for walks and little outings. She gave it a go on the escalators and on a park swing, scuffing the coarse sand under her feet and feeling a little mad. What would she tell the boys? As for the people in the Bed Department—Jackie, who shared the floor with her, and the customers who came in to look or buy—they all looked empty to her, like husks. As though she were the only real thing left. It was like that film with the pods, and she wanted to run away somewhere, to a deserted lighthouse, or a shack by the beach, and sit in a shaft of light while her baby grew.

Tom rang. His voice was a shock.

"I just thought I'd check up on you." He sounded close, he sounded right inside her ear. Kitty had to remind herself that there were miles of cable between them, a maze of electricity and static.

"I'm fine," she said. "How are things?"

"Good. Good."

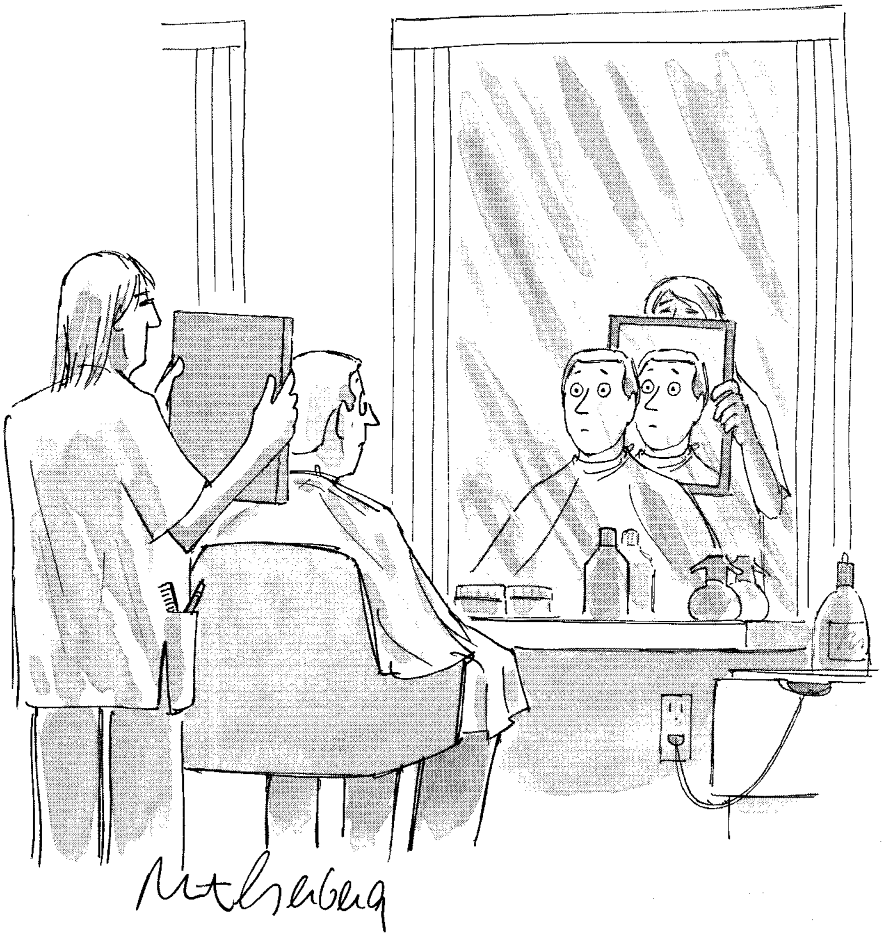
In the pause, she felt sorry for him. He wasn't used to this kind of thing.

"And yourself?" he said.

"Oh, flying," she said. "Flying form." And he took the hint and let it go.

Then, one morning, the down elevator sighed and stopped. People clumped down the steps carefully, almost aslant, squinting at the lines that were strangely solid now, though they still seemed to shift beneath their feet. Kitty was glad she wasn't on the thing when it ground to a halt. It would make you look so foolish. As it happened, the escalators were empty, apart from a young woman on the other side, who seemed to surge suddenly up. *Whoosh.*

Kitty knew it didn't mean anything, but she feared for her baby, which was now just eleven weeks old. She could not bear the lopsided sight of the stalled steps; they were like someone endlessly limping at the other end of the shop



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floor. She took a very long lunch, and when she came back a man had taken the panel off the bottom of the broken side. She was right about the chain—there it was, looping around the steps that were wedges, actually, when you looked at them side-on. They packed around the central pivot like big slices of metal pie, then separated out on the way up, dangling their triangular bases into space.

The escalator man glanced at her as she stared into the works, and then went back to his phase tester, tipping the metal gently here and there. He had hair on the backs of his hands, fine and light: one of those furry men with cushioned muscles and uncertain eyes. Kitty stood for a long time, making him uneasy. He glanced over his shoulder again, but he did not really see her—which was fine.

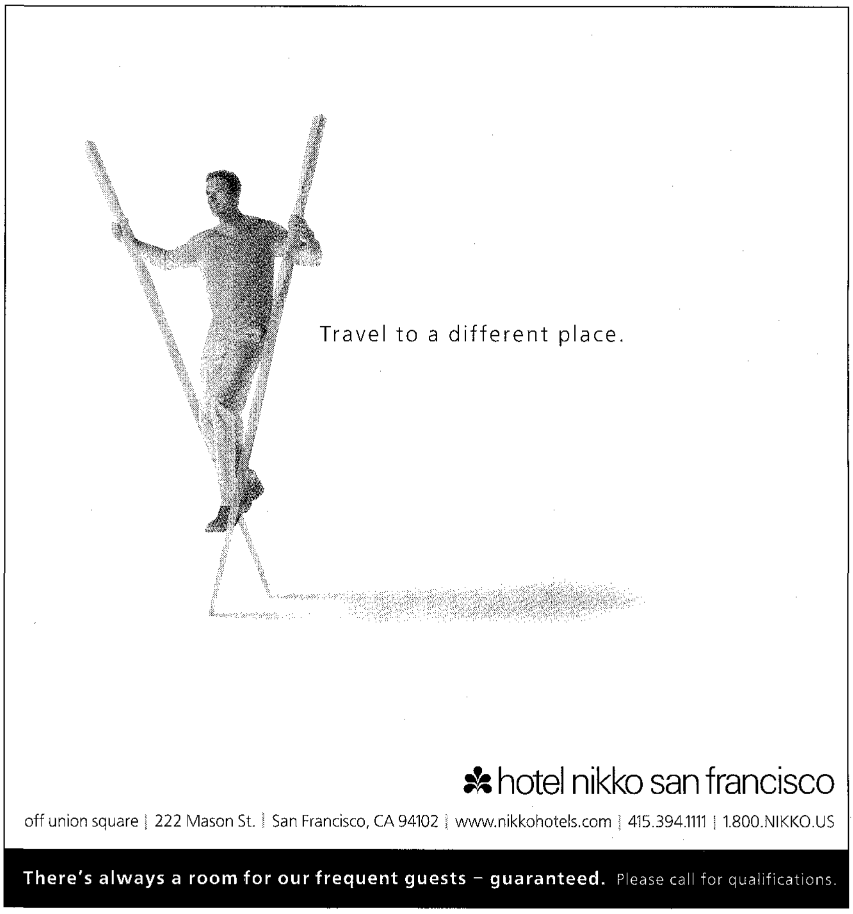
Kitty lost the baby at thirteen weeks, or lost something, at any rate. She looked at the blood on the wad of toilet paper and wondered if she was in the change of life, after all. Perhaps she had imagined the baby, perhaps it had never been there in the first place. She called in sick and went to bed and could not cry.

At the weekend, she drove her younger son to his soccer game in the Fifteen Acres. She had to park a distance away, because he was embarrassed by the car. Also, he did not like having his mother on the sidelines anymore, so Kitty, amused, went for a walk instead. She thought she might look for the deer. And, almost as she thought it, there they were, a herd of does and their fawns, standing or lying, and all of them chewing, watching, as she now watched, a pair of children and their toy plane buzzing at the other end of the glen.

She felt sure now that it had been a baby—that she had not been fooled. Her stomach was still warm and aching from it. The deer chewed on and did not mind her, while the toy plane buzzed and sputtered and fell to the ground.

The change of life.

Her life was changing, that was for sure, though she seemed to be standing still. But up or down? she wondered. Up or down? The children threw the plane back into the air, and it circled again on the end of its wire. Kitty walked on. It had been a baby, she knew it. She had been visited. How could it be down, when she felt such joy. ♦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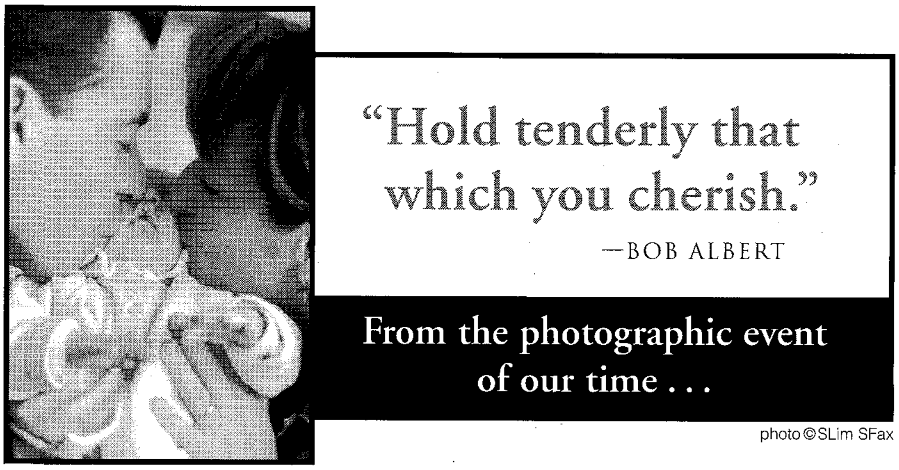
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THE CRITICS

IN FASHION

COSTUME OF THE COUNTRY

The Met show of Jackie's clothes conforms to the "iconic" view.

BY JUDITH THURMAN

Like many people who studiously reinvent themselves, Jacqueline Kennedy cultivated the perfect simplicity of manner that is often the grandest of affectations. She used her charm, an alloy of the gossamer and the ironic, to deflect notice from unseemly pretensions or raw appetites that her own self-scrutiny might have missed. The words commonly used to describe her beauty—"shimmering," "ethereal"—reinforce the impression of her otherworldliness. There was plenty of worldly hunger in Jackie, and steeliness, too. One sees it in her carriage. But these were sheathed, like the nails she bit to the quick, by the white gloves she wore even when she was perched atop an elephant in the heat of India, by her decorous reserve, her wifely deference, and the "feathery" voice that seemed never to utter an arrogant, vulgar, or impolitic public word. In private, though, she could be impious, even wicked. And those who knew her well also knew that, like the most absolute of queens, she was swift to punish, with implacable disfavor, the perceived crime of *lèse-majesté.*

I had the pleasure of a slight personal acquaintance with Jackie (or, rather, with Mrs. Onassis) when she was an editor at Doubleday. She had liked my first book, a biography of Isak Dinesen, and expressed interest in publishing the second, a life of Colette. We met at her office one morning early in 1990. Our interesting chat about French literature, the social history of the fin de siècle, and the Sapphic penchants of the great Belle Époque courtesans ("The touch of those ghastly old toads who kept them would have sent anyone rushing into a woman's arms") was followed, several weeks later, by one of the handwritten notes for which she was famous, expressing in the most gracious and sporting terms her disappointment that I had jilted her, so to speak, for another publisher. It was signed Jackie, and she wished me luck.

From time to time, Jackie would enquire about my progress through a mutual friend. Early in 1993—a year before her death—she invited us to "a girls' dinner," as she put it, "just the three of us," at her apartment on Fifth Avenue. My friend and I fretted about what to wear, but got it right, which is to say, we were dressed exactly as she was for a stormy winter night at home, in sweaters and slacks. A fire was burning in the library, and the wraithlike butler who kept it stoked also vigilantly refreshed our wineglasses. My memory of the conversation has both faded and been colored by sad subsequent events. We talked about books and gardens, the death of fathers and the vagaries of husbands, about pearls, Paris real estate, decorating, and the Clintons, whom she liked and pitied: they were about to discover the "horrors" of life in the White House fishbowl. We also discussed the tyranny of convention and agreed that we had all wasted our childhoods being good girls. Jackie had recently quit smoking but "approved of vice" and sympathetically offered me an ashtray. Over dinner, she recalled the tedium of formal diplomatic entertaining. "Jack," she said, "liked to complain that I always got to sit next to the fascinating men, while he got the boring wives." Mostly we spoke of love and, more especially, the love of sons. "If you play your cards right and give them their freedom," Jackie said, "they'll stay faithful to you. When you're a hideous, decrepit old woman, they'll take you to the opera."

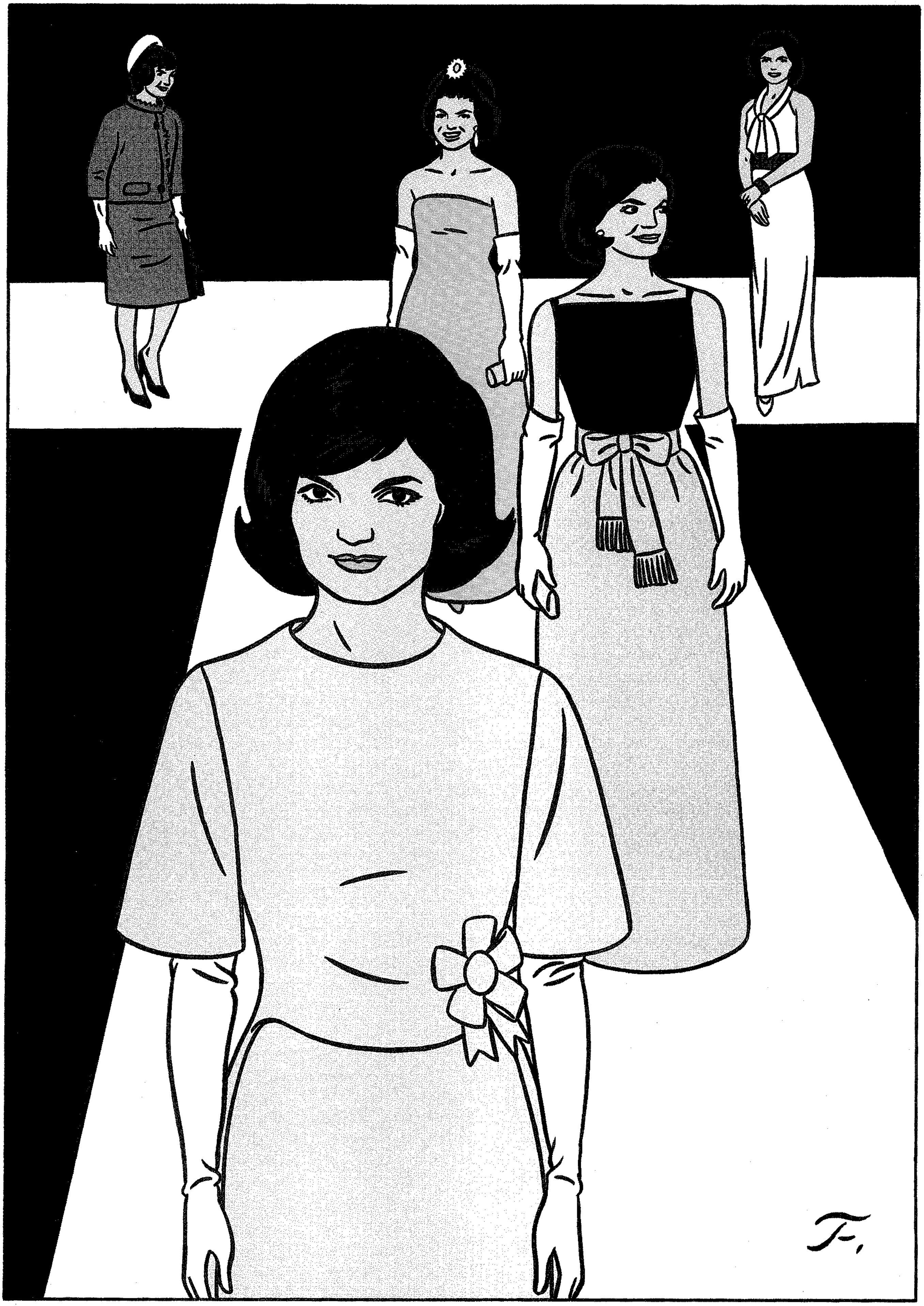
Jackie was not fated to become an old woman, nor her son to take her to the opera as one, and nothing could have made her hideous. The proof is to be found in a new show celebrating her loveliness frozen at its peak. "Jacqueline Kennedy: The White House Years," which opened on May 1st at the Costume Institute of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, focusses on her style. That style is best summed up by a cryptic pronouncement she once made to our mutual friend: "One should always dress like a marble column." On the morning of her husband's Inauguration, Mrs. Kennedy ascended the column (making sure one couldn't peek up her skirt from the base) and held her pose—like Buñuel's Simon of the Desert, though much better groomed—for a thousand days.

Her official wardrobe from that era is the drawing card of the new show—curated by Hamish Bowles, an editor at *Vogue*—which has been luxuriously installed in a suite of galleries on the second floor, rather than in the cramped basement where costumes and couture are generally shown. In addition to clothes and accessories, it includes a selection of her correspondence about fashion and décor; some of the menus and seating charts from those "tedious" official dinners (which look like they were fun); and film footage from her triumphant state visits to France and Latin America, her trip to India and Pakistan as a good-will ambassador, and her televised tour of the Executive Mansion, which she had restored, Bowles writes in the catalogue to the show (Bulfinch; $50), "as a museum of presidential history."

The restoration was the most con-

TOP: KOREN, 1/20/68; OPPOSITE: FLOC'H

Jackie Kennedy, in her inaugural gown (center), didn't want to be "the Marie Antoinette or Josephine of the 1960s," but she was.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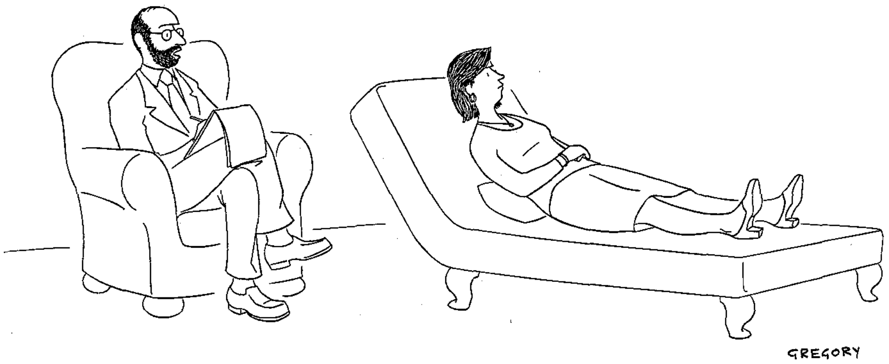

"Are you uncomfortable discussing this because I'm a man or because I'm your husband?"

• •

crete contribution she made as First Lady, although there were others, more ineffable. Unlike Diana, Princess of Wales, who so touchingly, heretically, and stupidly believed she was entitled to be an individual, Jackie acquiesced in becoming a symbol. Her aristocratic idealism was, in that respect, quite orthodox, like that of Isak Dinesen, a writer whose work had informed it. "Exactly as if a heavy weight had been tied on to her legs," Dinesen wrote (of a Somali girl on the threshold of puberty, not of Mrs. Kennedy), "she took to walking slowly, slowly; she held her eyes cast down after the best pattern. . . . The Novice gave herself up gravely and proudly to all the hardships of the rite." The only writer who, to my knowledge, ever shot her own fur coats then adds that the maiden "was herself fascinated and possessed by the process of her transformation." So was Jackie.

Mrs. Kennedy had several fur coats, including one of Somali leopard, which inspired a "mad rush for the rare pelt," according to Jay Mulvaney in "Jackie: The Clothes of Camelot" (St. Martin's; $35). It is not in the show. Nothing is in the show that might cast the slightest pall over Jackie's apotheosis as an "icon of style" who is still able to spur the sale of a million museum tickets, product spinoffs such as a line of makeup, and tie-in books—in addition to the catalogue and Mulvaney's offering, there is "Jackie Style," by Pamela Clarke Keogh (HarperCollins; $45)—or that might suggest her life was anything but a series of iconically happy days and iconically glamorous nights filled with iconic public service, iconic promotion of high culture, iconic travel, iconic wifehood and motherhood, iconic decorating and couture fittings, and iconic, if weird, hairdos. There is no trace of the most iconic piece of clothing Jackie ever wore, the pink Chanel suit that was besmirched with her husband's blood and brains in the motorcade at Dallas, and which she refused to change in the hours following his assassination or for the photographs of Lyndon Johnson's swearing-in, saying, "I want them to see what they have done." Also missing in action are the mourning clothes—particularly the black veil straight from a Goya that the bereft widow wore with stoic grandeur to the funeral she orchestrated so masterfully on a weekend's notice—which illustrate better than anything in the show what Bowles calls Jackie's "keen appreciation of ceremony"; the way "she rigorously oversaw her own visual presentation"; and her "understanding of the semantics of dress and of the way in which she could use her public image to help communicate the more abstract ideals that were important to her." Indeed, had one wandered into the Met on May Day after forty years in a fallout shelter, one would have had absolutely no inkling that anything terrible ever happened to this golden couple so flush with power and apparent happiness. The display of Jackie's sacred relics is maudlin enough, and it would be ghoulish if the pink suit or the black veil were part of it. But in an exhibition of her "legacy" from the White House years, they and what they represent—reality—ought to be acknowledged.

Couture, rather than reality, is Mr. Bowles's theatre of expertise. He presents the clothes with a savant's reverence for their quality, construction, provenance, and metaphoric content. He writes imaginatively about the "armorial" aspect of a wardrobe that was, for the most part, cut from shiny, "rigid" fabrics with fetchingly exotic names like gazar, zibeline, Alaskine, and radzimir. He describes a shocking-pink cocktail dress by Givenchy with an elaborate bow at the back that Jackie wore to a White House Christmas party as "appropriately suggestive of a luxuriously wrapped gift." He appreciates a "liquid, columnar" evening gown of draped silk jersey—Oleg Cassini's homage to Mme. Grès—as "entirely appropriate" to Mrs. Kennedy's "dynamic modern embodiment of an ancient muse." He deconstructs an opera coat, also by Givenchy—a tribute to his mentor, Balenciaga—as "a palimpsest of historical references, suggesting by turns a Venetian domino, a Kabuki robe, and, as General de Gaulle himself remarked, . . . a costume in a Watteau painting."

But the impeccable Mr. Bowles is also attached to polyester clichés like "timeless elegance." Jackie's state wardrobe wasn't timeless and wasn't all that elegant. It vacillates between the matronly and the little-girlish. The young Mrs. Kennedy was at her most chic in a riding habit or a pair of capri pants worn with a tan, sandals, a headscarf, and dark glasses. She looked most beautiful when her hair was still short and curly—before Kenneth or Alexandre pouffed and lacquered it into the modern equivalent of a court wig. With a few notable exceptions, most of them atypically "liquid" evening gowns, her endlessly copied and influential garments in their Queen Mother palette—"covered-up" dresses and suits with dirndly waists, tailored overblouses, demure bows, awkward stoles, boxy jackets cropped at the hip, and A-line shifts or skirts hemmed just below the knee—now seem dated, even mediocre. It's only on the incandescent Jackie in the old photographs (and particularly in the photographs where she's standing next to some poor frump half her height and twice her weight) that they excite desire.

They repel desire, too. The "armorial" smoothness of her hair and clothes telegraphs a message of defiance—"Nothing can ruffle me."

Jacqueline Kennedy held her pose on the column—or as the column—with more aplomb than any other modern First Lady or European queen. She was less provincial and better educated than most royalty and, in that respect, well endowed to rehabilitate the cultural inferiority complex of a crude frontier republic. "What a joy," John Steinbeck said at J.F.K.'s Inauguration, "that literacy is no longer prima facie evidence of treason." But there was almost nothing democratic about Jackie except America's illusion, in which she briefly colluded, that she was one of us. And there was almost nothing modern about her, either. In all those photographs, whatever "simple," "crisp," or "streamlined" garment she may be wearing, Jackie projects an archaic notion of her symbolic value—of woman's value—and the exorbitance of her finery is an essential part of it. As Dinesen writes of the Somali wives on her African farm, they "cannot acquire a pair of slippers in any possible way except through a man, they cannot own themselves but must needs belong to some male . . . but they are still the one supreme prize of life. It is a surprising thing . . . what amounts of silks, gold, amber, and coral the Somali women get out of their men."

Unlike a Somali husband, Jack Kennedy was as outraged as any sitcom spouse when he found out what fabulous sums Jackie was spending on clothes (and a number of biographers have suggested that her shopping binges were revenge for his sexual ones). Mulvaney quotes the President's "frequent complaint" that "she's breaking my ass" and estimates that in 1961 Jackie's wardrobe expenditures totalled forty thousand dollars—a figure that did not include the bills from her official couturier, Oleg Cassini, which were, at the request of her father-in-law, sent directly to him. Old Joe was an archaic type himself: the tribal patriarch. As did Onassis after him, he understood what he was paying for.

Jackie's charisma, like Diana's, was a function of her status as a supreme prize, and the attributes of their official preciousness were similar: youth, beauty,

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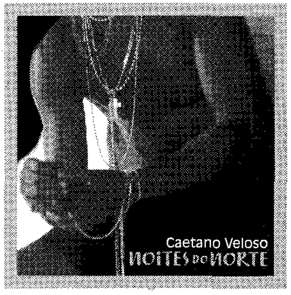

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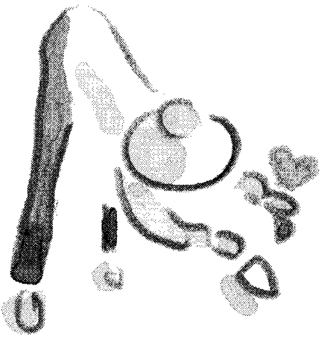
class, goodness, love for their children—and marriage to an alpha mate. Perhaps when the chemistry of the brain is finally understood we will discover that the attraction emanating from a charismatic person or thing stimulates very ancient, even atavistic circuits. The evolution of society has been away from hierarchy, but the human race is still wired for it. We seek to tame, or at least to propitiate, the powers we can't control by submitting to them, and the figures who have seized or been invested with supreme authority have learned, in the long, erratic "progress" of civilization, to make ritual gestures of obeisance to those they rule—the laying on of hands, the washing of feet, the sharing of bread—at the same time that they flaunt the emblems of their hieratic splendor: crowns, sceptres, and gorgeous robes. "She took her sons to McDonald's; they wore baseball caps; she embraced AIDS victims," people said of Diana. "She could speak to immigrants in their own language; she invited black people to the White House; she never spoiled her children," people said of Jackie. And when the charismatic figure is sincere, or seems to be, in her display of respect for those beneath her in the hierarchy, which is rare enough, she evokes a gratitude from the objects of her benevolence out of all proportion to her actual good deeds. Condescension is experienced as communion, and that is the essence—the magic trick—of charisma. For it humbles and exalts at the same time.

So does tragedy. The most intense moments of communion one had with Jackie or Diana were at funerals, and those of the President and the Princess were paradoxically idyllic. What we call an idyll is a taste of wholeness—of moral or emotional unity. Idylls are often fabricated cynically for commercial and propagandistic purposes, and experience teaches us to regard them as mirages, at best—like the "unspoiled tropical paradise" offering communion with nature that is promised by the tourist brochure. A true idyll, which is unforgettable to those who experience it, is inevitably ephemeral, because the kind of passionate communality it calls for—a oneness of attention, action, feeling, purpose, and desire—is so difficult to sustain, the more so the greater the number of participants. Those two sudden and shocking violent deaths surprised us with the revelation of an everyday sense of loss: of the experience of solidarity in a fractious world.

The ersatz idyll of "Camelot" was one of Jackie's rare though egregious public lapses of taste. A week after Kennedy's assassination, she gave an interview to Theodore White in which she confided that "at night, before we'd go to sleep . . . Jack liked to play some records . . . and the song he loved most," from the Lerner and Lowe musical, ended with the line "Don't let it be forgot, that once there was a spot, for one brief, shining moment that was known as Camelot." But, according to Donald Spoto, one of the better Jackie biographers:

> Most of Jack's ardent admirers admitted, years later, that his taste in music was pretty much limited to "Bill Bailey, Won't You Please Come Home." . . . "There was no Camelot in the early 1960s," wrote his Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, "and John Kennedy himself would have been the first to kick such notions out of the window. He was too skeptical for sentimentality." Arthur Schlesinger agreed: "The Camelot idea is a kind of mythomania."

Jackie's own mythomania was shaped by the pretensions of a family that came from the immigrant working class on both sides and invented an aristocratic history for themselves—her mother claiming to be descended from the Lees (they were Lees but poor Irish ones) and her grandfather Bouvier from the noble house of Fontaine (his great-grandfather, a carpenter and cabinet-maker, had emigrated from the South of France). It was polished at Miss Porter's and Vassar and in the society of East Hampton and Newport. It was given depth by her avid reading of history, and particularly the history, in French, of the ancien régime. Jackie admired the mistresses of kings and had their gift—which is that of Woman as supreme prize—for disarming blasé tyrants by presenting them with the trophy of her elusive favor. She also felt an affinity with the salonnières of the Enlightenment, and became her own version of one. "The White House," her husband joked, "is becoming a sort of eating place for artists. But they never ask us out."



Jackie's passion for couture was part of her fervid romance with all things French, beginning with her own background. There are some droll footnotes to her Francophilia among the letters in the exhibition. In one, to Cassini, she declares, "I refuse to have Jack's administration plagued by fashion stories of a sensational nature—& to be the Marie Antoinette or Josephine of the 1960s"—which, of course, she was. In another she asks him to put his "brilliant mind" to work on her wardrobe for day—ensembles for "lunch and afternoon that I would wear if Jack were President of France . . . très Princesse de Réthy, mais jeune." Cassini, at first glance, seems like an odd choice for court dressmaker. He was known, in the forties and fifties, for what Bowles calls his "high-voltage" and "provocatively form-fitting" Hollywood film costumes rather than for the original quality of his own work. But he was a Kennedy family friend: discreet, chivalrous, accommodating, well-born—a White Russian, thus virtually French—and he liked women.

Liking women, however, was not a prerequisite for Jackie's admiration. In an essay she wrote at twenty-one, which won her *Vogue's* 1951 Prix de Paris, she chose Baudelaire, Oscar Wilde, and Diaghilev as the three dead men she would most like to meet, and she had a fondness for the fin-de-siècle decadents. Decadence as an aesthetic, if not a way of life, particularly appeals to artistically inclined daughters of privilege, like Jackie, who are raised by prim mothers and neglected by glamorously wild fathers they adore, and who feel that their vital flame has been stifled by the tyranny of convention. Such wasted good girlhoods in white gloves often breed grandiosity—the fantasy of reclaiming a demonic, noble patrimony they have been denied—along with an insatiable covetousness for experience. It's not a coincidence that on a 1961 trip to Paris, when she was asked what painting she'd liked most in the Jeu de Paume, Jackie chose—scandalously—Manet's "Olympia," the image, Wayne Koestenbaum writes in "Jackie Under My Skin," "of a nude prostitute posed as an odalisque with a black serving girl behind her. In it, the odalisque's gaze is unashamed, direct, confrontational. It is a painting intended to *épater le bourgeois*."

A cautious woman averse to discomfort and circumscribed by fame, Jackie could engage the unashamed, the direct, and the confrontational only vicariously. She did so through literature, and through her friendships with artists. Her hunger for a woman's life rich in experience was channelled into the pursuit of a rich woman's life. But her most flamboyant fling with brazenness—the marriage to Onassis—seems to have cured her infatuation with it. After her second widowhood, it took Jackie years of serious work and quiet civilian living to reclaim the individuality she had surrendered. The world's continuing obsession with her "influence on fashion" was, as she wrote to a prospective biographer, Carl Sferrazza Anthony, an "annoyance." It's difficult to imagine that she would ever have sanctioned this exhibition.

I couldn't help measuring the distance between the wry, sixty-three-year-old woman I had dined with—in a chenille sweater and a pair of slippers, with her hair down—and the fey, young princess-bride doll in the film clips and photographs at the Met. One of Bowles's more delirious flights of couture scholarship arrested me. He describes a "fairy-tale" gown in "silver-spangled white synthetic tulle embroidered with rhinestones and trimmed with gray silk velvet" (which isn't quite as dreadful as it sounds), adapted by Cassini from a design by Karl Lagerfeld. "The detailing, however, is at variance with Parisian standards. Bordering the bodice and hem, for instance, are bands of net that were embroidered before being applied to the finished garment. In a Paris couture atelier the embroidery would have been worked directly on the panels of the dress itself before it was fully assembled, thus becoming an integral part of the gown rather than an applied element. All Mrs. Kennedy required, however, was a dress that was perfectly photogenic, and Cassini's served this purpose effectively."

If the hidden seams of Jackie's character had been examined with the same meticulous regard, this perfect fashion show might have been less photogenic but more moving. ♦

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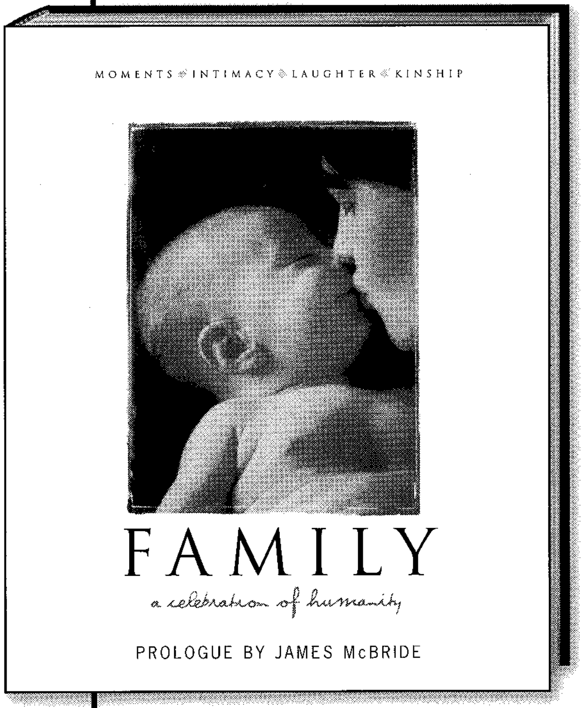
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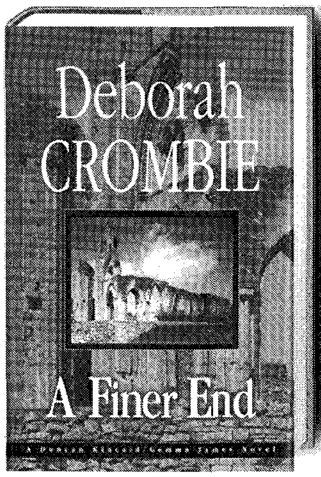

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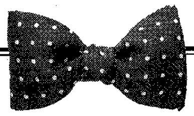

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BOOKS

BIRTHDAY BOY

A new stack of books on Bob Dylan's sixtieth.

BY DAVID REMNICK

Early in his career, Bob Dylan divined that his singing voice was for truth and beauty, his speaking voice for everything else. In conversation and in interviews with the press, he displayed an uncanny gift for put-on, putdown, deflection, protection, mumbo and jumbo. He told Joan Baez that the only reason he wrote "Masters of War" was that he knew it would sell records. Rather than confess to a middle-class background, he inflated his folkie bona fides: oh, he'd run away from home more or less annually from the age of ten; he'd performed in carnivals; he had no mother, no father, and worked as a Times Square hustler. A bar-mitzvah boy born Robert Allen Zimmerman, he feigned obliviousness, saying, "Years later, when I'd recorded a few albums, then I started seeing it in places: 'Bob Dylan's a Jew,' stuff like that. I said, 'I never knew that.' After a period of time I thought, Well, gee, maybe I'll look into that." At press conferences, he came off as a cross between Salvador Dali and Professor Irwin Corey; when a roomful of British reporters earnestly asked the composer of "The Times They Are A-Changin' " if he had any advice for the young, he produced an enormous light bulb and recommended that every person carry one.

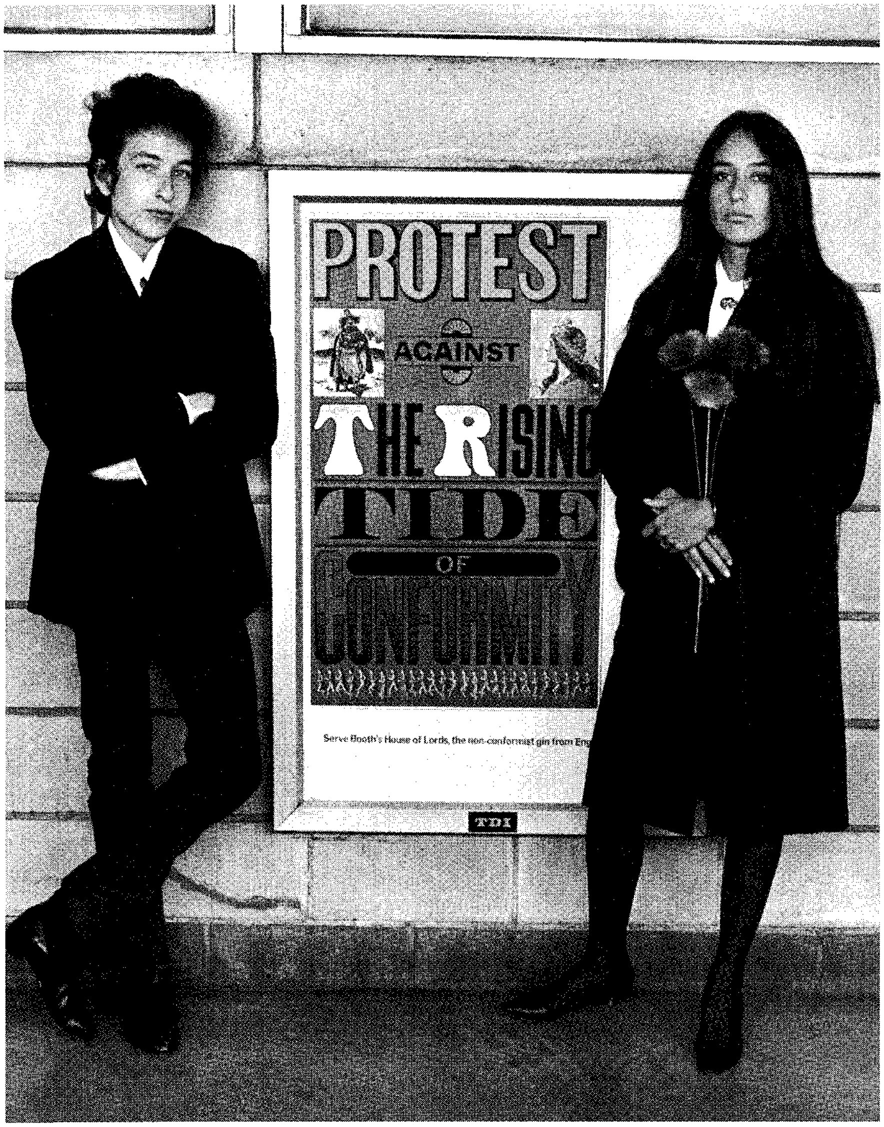
Dylan cultivated an image of unpredictability, the better to finesse adoration and dodge expectations. It was one thing to limn the strangeness of his lyrics; it was quite another to figure out why, for example, he elected to butcher "Hava Nagila" on the harmonica for a Lubavitcher Hasidim telethon. As a writer and as a musician, Dylan remains a searcher, and the same is true offstage. He studied painting with the son of Sholom Aleichem, the Gospels with California Evangelicals, and Blake with Allen Ginsberg. Onstage, he could wax Billy Sunday, castigating an audience for betraying the path of Christ, or he could tell lounge-lizard jokes that would shame Shecky Greene; he could turn silent and disdainful like Miles Davis or get jiggy with a bowlegged dance like his early hero Buddy Holly. For Dylan's least-informed audiences—the ones that say they like a few protest anthems but think he sings a little funny—his unpredictability seals the deal; he's ancient history, no more essential or lasting than Peter Max or Peter Yarrow. But for the audience that still finds myriad songs and performances to admire and to love, long after the "Blood on the Tracks" album, in 1975, well, for them it is only when Dylan is being weirdly ordinary, as he was a couple of months ago at the Oscars, thanking Tommy Mottola and the guys from Columbia Records, that they worry.

The story of Dylan's life has been told countless times, though never particularly well. It's a sad omission. Over the years, I've read a teetering stack of Dylan biographies and commentaries (there are countless Web sites to contend with now), and, while some possess interesting raw material (Robert Shelton's early interviews in "No Direction Home") or a mad, sparkling brilliance (Greil Marcus's analysis of "The Basement Tapes," in his "Invisible Republic"), none of them do the start-to-finish biographical work nearly as thoroughly as Peter Guralnick has on Elvis Presley. Rest assured, in the current Dylan-birthday season—he turns sixty on May 24th—the stack has grown. We get "Down the Highway: The Life of Bob Dylan," by Howard Sounes (Grove; $27.50), a biography by turns rudimentary and tabloid. (It seems proudest of its account of what is least interesting—marriages, girlfriends, grooming habits—and is all but silent on the music.) There is also the behemoth "Song & Dance Man III: The Art of Bob Dylan" (Continuum;

$35), by Michael Gray, an English critic who has many ideas (not all of them fully baked) about the use Dylan may or may not have made of folk, blues, country blues, the Book of Revelation, English ballads, Blake, Keats, Elvis, Blind Willie McTell, movie one-liners, fairy tales, nursery rhymes, and God knows what else, all in a tidy nine hundred pages. (The "III" indicates that this is a third edition; the thing keeps growing.)

The one new publication of distinction and clarity is the far more modest yet sure-handed "Positively 4th Street: The Lives and Times of Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, Mimi Baez Fariña and Richard Fariña" (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $25), by David Hajdu, the author of "Lush Life," a biography of Billy Strayhorn. Hajdu centers his story on that pivotal moment in Dylan's life when he arrived in New York from the Midwest of his youth and, through a process of attention, absorption, appropriation, and sheer, inexplicable genius, created himself. "Do you know what Dylan was when he came to the Village?" Liam Clancy, of the Clancy Brothers, once said. "He was a teenager, and the only thing I can compare him with was blotting paper. He soaked everything up. He had this immense curiosity; he was totally blank, and was ready to soak up everything that came within his range." As you read the story, you begin to get at least a sense of Dylan's peculiarity: a nineteen-year-old kid, ordinary in so many ways, and yet possessed of a gift that will, in a matter of months, set him on the road to being a songwriter and performer whose mark on American music and language is lasting and deep. He is in that line of American originals—Whitman was one, Muhammad Ali another—who imagine a character for themselves, a variety of uniqueness, and then become it.

In Dylan's ambition and desire, Hajdu does not hesitate to tell us, there was sometimes an acidic ruthlessness. He accepted a thousand kindnesses in those early days—clubs to play in, floors and couches to sleep on, food to eat. One girlfriend shoplifted for him, another educated him in politics. The songs written in response were not always grateful. One would not want to be on the receiving end of "It Ain't Me, Babe" or "Like a Rolling Stone." Even Baez, who did more than anyone else to introduce Dylan to the enormous folk audience of the early sixties, eventually found herself abandoned. It was a time of creative frenzy, sometimes conscious, sometimes not, and only years later did Dylan acknowledge the complexity of his debts and pay them back in full and in his own way. He did it not merely by renewing old friendships but also by furthering his own revolution in American song.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Dylan and Joan Baez in 1964. She was his most important early promoter.

DANIEL KRAMER

Dylan grew up in Hibbing, Minnesota, a small mining town near the Canadian border with bears in the woods, northern lights in the sky, and an open iron-ore pit three miles wide and five hundred feet deep. "In the winter everything was still, nothing moved," Dylan once said. "Eight months of that . . . you can have some amazing hallucinogenic experiences doing nothing but looking out your window." His father, Abe Zimmerman, helped run a modestly successful family-owned electric-appliance shop. As a singer, Dylan was right away a fierce presence. When he was five, he asked to sing at a Mother's Day celebration. "He stamped his foot and commanded attention," his mother, Beatty Zimmerman, recalled. "Bobby said, 'If everybody in this room will keep quiet, I will sing for my grandmother. I'm going to sing "Some Sunday Morning." ' Well, he sang it, and they tore the place apart. They clapped so hard that he sang his other big number, 'Accentuate the Positive.' "

As a boy and as a teen-ager, Dylan played guitar and piano and sang, with more passion than conventional grace, and picked up his pleasures and his influences from distant big-city radio stations, late at night, when the signal was clear. He started a series of bands—the Shadow Blasters, the Golden Chords, Elston Gunn and the Rock Boppers—and he was always the front man. He played talent shows and dances, the PTA and the Moose Lodge. It didn't matter much to him if he was ignored or booed, according to his girlfriend at the time, Echo Helstrom. "Bob was sort of oblivious to the whole fact that people were not turned on by his music," she said. "He lived in his own world, and it didn't bother him. There was this cat, playing like they were clapping, when they were really booing." Dylan was dreamy, introverted, yet absolutely single-minded. He and his band buddy John Bucklen talked about becoming stars, but only Bob was really serious. "He had it calculated all the way," Bucklen said. "Each step, how he was gonna do it, and how you get to be a star." He had good taste in role models. He saw James Dean in "Rebel Without a Cause" or Buddy Holly performing in Duluth and quickly made them, made their personae, a part of "Bob Dylan," a name Helstrom says he had figured out for himself in high school; he listened to early Elvis Presley and that, too, became part of his accent and vocabulary. As he went off to college, his mother pleaded with him, "Don't keep writing poetry, please don't. Go to school and do something constructive. . . . Get a degree." No chance. Asked by the high-school yearbook to name his ambition, Dylan wrote, "To join Little Richard."

If Dylan's secondary schooling was in the rudiments of rock, his college career—a year-long hangout on the fringes of the University of Minnesota—was a crash course in folk: not the Kingston Trio and the other sanitized music on the charts at the time but the grittier stuff that had its roots in English ballads, hillbilly music, and the blues. Dylan started out living at the Jewish fraternity house Sigma Alpha Mu—he was a Sammy—but he spent all his time in Dinkytown, a Minneapolis neighborhood that featured a small boho crowd and a coffeehouse called the Ten O'Clock Scholar. Going by the name Dylan from the moment he arrived, he met students and hangers on who were willing to hear him sing and were quick to introduce him to new voices. Dylan listened to Odetta and "right then and there," he said, "I went out and traded my electric guitar and amplifier for an acoustical guitar—a flat-top Gibson." Authenticity was the prized quality for the Dinkytown crowd, and, to hear it, they pursued recordings assembled by the Library of Congress and musicologists like John and Alan Lomax, who had discovered Leadbelly in a Louisiana prison, and a strange young hunchback named Harry Smith, whose "Anthology of American Folk Music," a six-disk compilation issued by Folkways Records in 1952, was the Bible of all folksingers. On the "Anthology" records, Dylan heard Dock Boggs, Blind Lemon Jefferson, the Carter Family, the Reverend J. M. Gates, Sleepy John Estes, dozens of strange and obscure voices singing about train wrecks, floods, faith, betrayal, an America as rich, joyful, and tragic as "Leaves of Grass." A canon didn't really exist; Smith assembled it and folksingers everywhere learned it and taught it to each other. "That's where the wealth of folk music was, on that particular record," Dylan once said. "It's all poetry, every single one of those songs."

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Dylan and his friends also read Kerouac, Ferlinghetti, and Ginsberg, all in vogue at the time, but by far the most important book he picked up was Woody Guthrie's mythopoeic memoir, "Bound for Glory." It is not hard to see why the book struck such a nerve. It begins with Guthrie travelling in a boxcar, and describes a Minnesota storm—"that bright crackling lightning that booms and zooms." Guthrie is a character utterly at liberty, never at rest, singing and writing and loving and always moving on. Dylan began learning dozens of Guthrie's songs: "Pastures of Plenty" and "Deportee," "This Land Is Your Land" and "VD Blues." In time, he adopted Woody's dress, Woody's mannerisms, Woody's accent. Cigarettes and a months-long case of bronchitis helped, but Dylan's new singing voice—unpretty, emphatic, indeterminately regional, redolent of a shadowy history—was, to a great extent, a choice, an acquired thing. When he was drunk or stoned (marijuana had arrived in Dinkytown), Dylan would don an old hat and pretend to be his hero. "If you didn't call him Woody," one former girlfriend, Bonnie Beecher, said, "he wouldn't answer."

After little more than a year, Dylan had learned what he could from Dinkytown and planned to leave for New York. "New York was a dream," he said many years later. "It was a dream of cosmopolitan riches of the mind. It was the greatest place for me to learn and to meet other people who were on similar journeys." It was where the clubs were and where Woody Guthrie lived.

"I just got up one morning and left," Dylan said. "I'd spent so much time thinking about it I couldn't think about it anymore. . . . I stood on the highway during a blizzard snowstorm believing in the mercy of the world and headed East, didn't have nothing but my guitar and suitcase. That was my whole world." Riding in a four-door Pontiac, Dylan and a friend named Fred Underhill arrived in New York on January 24, 1961. Within a few hours, according to most accounts, he'd made it to an open-mike at the Cafe Wha?, on MacDougal Street, in Greenwich Village, and announced, "I been travelin' around the country. Followin' in Woody Guthrie's footsteps."

Within a couple of days, Dylan visited Guthrie's home, in the Howard Beach neighborhood in Queens. He knocked on the door, and twice he was sent on his way, first by Guthrie's daughter, Nora, and then by the babysitter. Guthrie did not live with the family; he had Huntington's disease, from which he was slowly, painfully dying, and lived at Greystone Park Hospital, in Morris Plains, New Jersey. Finally, Arlo, who was thirteen at the time, let Dylan in. "I thought he was kinda cool," Arlo said later. "I could tell by his boots he wasn't coming by to sell something." Dylan gave Arlo a harmonica lesson.

In the following months, Dylan visited Guthrie many times at Greystone and at the home of Sidsel and Bob Gleason, in East Orange, where Guthrie went on Sundays. Dylan almost always sang for Woody, usually Woody's own songs. After the first meeting, Dylan sent his friends in Minneapolis a postcard: "I know him and met him and saw him and sang to him. I know Woody—Goddamn." Guthrie's right arm flailed uncontrollably, his speech was hard to follow. "He was still able to walk, but he looked like he was walking across a trampoline," Joe Klein wrote in "Woody Guthrie: A Life." Guthrie had many visitors from the music world, but he did not hesitate to anoint this cherubic kid in his corduroy cap and dusty jeans. "That boy's got a voice," Guthrie said. "Maybe he won't make it with his writing, but he can sing it." As a tribute, Dylan took the tune to Guthrie's "1913 Massacre" and wrote one of his first songs, "Song to Woody."

Even in biographies less deft than Klein's and Hajdu's, the picture of Dylan during those first months and years in New York is one of passionate American hunger, of ambition and originality. Besides Guthrie, Dylan came to know everyone worth knowing in the Village: singers like Dave Van Ronk and Ramblin' Jack Elliott; Izzy Young, who ran the Folklore Center; Mike Porco, who owned Gerde's Folk City; a smart and pretty young woman named Suze Rotolo, who came from a left-wing family; and, sometime later, Joan Baez, who, with a soprano voice of great purity, attracted a college audience without scaring the parents and made it to the cover of *Time*. Dylan slept or he didn't; he ate or he didn't. He smoked and drank and listened and talked. And, for all his pretensions, tall tales, and affectations (the faults of a young man), Dylan had ears and respect for the best music around him. He was lucky to be just old enough and in the right place to hear that last generation of bluesmen and folksingers.

"There was a bunch of us, me included, who got to see all these people close up—people like Son House, Reverend Gary Davis or Sleepy John Estes," Dylan said in a 1993 interview. "Just to sit there and be up close and watch them play, you could study what they were doing, plus a little bit of their lives rubbed off on you."

In no time at all, Dylan had not only sung to Woody but played with Cisco Houston and the Clancy Brothers, recorded (on harmonica) with Harry Belafonte, Carolyn Hester, and Victoria Spivey, and played at Gerde's Folk City as an opening act, first for John Lee Hooker and then for the Greenbriar Boys. He had a gift for making his own luck. He went out of his way to impress Robert Shelton, then a freelancer, and Shelton's rave review in the *Times* ("Bob Dylan: A Distinctive Folk-Song Stylist") led to a recording contract with John Hammond, of Columbia Records, who had discovered Billie Holiday and would later discover Bruce Springsteen.

That first album, called simply "Bob Dylan" (1962), included talking blues, traditional folk and blues songs, and "Song to Woody." The debt to Guthrie, Jesse Fuller, Blind Lemon Jefferson, Bukka White, and Harry Smith's "Anthology" is enormous. At that point, Dylan was more than willing to acknowledge what lay behind and beneath his music. "I seem to draw into myself whatever comes my way," he told a reporter for *Seventeen* at the time. "Maybe I'm nothing but all these things I soak up. I don't know."

But what came next spoke of something far more mysterious than a young man's gift for imitation. Dylan went on a five-year-long binge of songwriting that transformed popular music. The first step was the decision to write at all. "I wanted just to sing," Dylan said. "A song to sing. And there came a point where I couldn't sing anything. I had to write what I wanted to say, because what I wanted to say, nobody else was writing. I couldn't find it anywhere." Like Hemingway in the Paris years, Dylan wrote at a rate suggesting possession: "Blowin' in the Wind" came in a couple of hours, "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall" in a kind of terror trance during the Cuban missile crisis.

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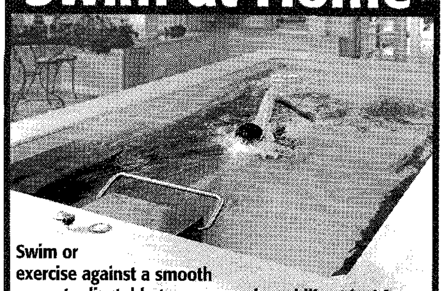

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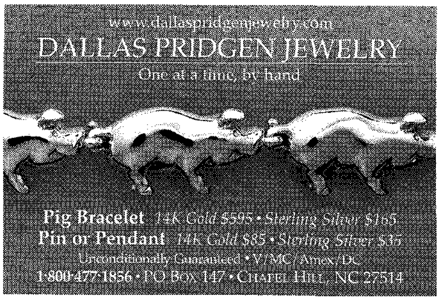

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he would call them—he sought to combine the two great musical impulses of his youth, the rock and roll he had heard on the radio late at night in Hibbing and the folk songs he had learned in Dinkytown and the Village. In his long career, Dylan has sold only a fraction of the number of records sold by the Beatles and the Rolling Stones (some fifty-seven million, fewer than the Carpenters); but by the time "Like a Rolling Stone" came out, in 1965, everyone, save the folk purists, was beginning to see that in marrying rock to folk, emotional drive to lyrical intelligence, he was changing everything. The rock of his youth, Dylan said later, was all "great catch-phrases and driving pulse rhythms and you could get high on the energy but they weren't serious or didn't reflect life in a realistic way. . . . Life is full of complexities and rock 'n' roll didn't reflect that. It was just put on a happy face and ride, Sally, ride, there was nothing even resembling 'Sixteen Snow White Horses' or 'See That My Grave Is Kept Clean.' . . . If I did anything, I brought one to the other." The result was the songs on "Bringing It All Back Home" (1965), "Highway 61 Revisited" (1965), and "Blonde on Blonde" (1966), to say nothing of his half-acoustic, half-electric performances in England with the Band in 1966. Without Dylan, the Beatles would likely have stuck to simple R. & B.; without him, no Neil Young, no Lou Reed, no Joni Mitchell, no Bruce Springsteen, no Clash, no Kurt Cobain. The amazing postscript is that Dylan himself did not stop there.

Hajdu's book describes well the bitter moment when Dylan, who had been mothered, adored, and promoted by Baez, cast her aside as he rejected protest songs for a more internal, hallucinatory vocabulary and, eventually, an electric beat. When Dylan toured England in the spring of 1965 (the moment captured in D. A. Pennebaker's film "Don't Look Back"), Baez came along for the trip, but, to her humiliation, he wouldn't invite her onstage to sing. Brokenhearted, she went home.

"I never considered myself a folksinger," he said at the time. "They called me that if they wanted to. I didn't care. I latched on, when I got to New York City, because I saw what a huge audience there was. I knew that I wasn't going to stay there. I knew it wasn't my thing. I knew Woody did this kind of thing and Woody was famous, and I used it." Folk music, Dylan said, "is a bunch of fat people."

Dylan evidently needed to say those things, the better to wall himself off from the boos he heard at various times, from Newport to Manchester, and from pious reviewers who wrote him open letters calling him a traitor to folk and to left-wing politics. But those days are past, and for a long time now Dylan has made clear his devotion to the intelligence, austerity, and strangeness of early folk music. For the Rolling Thunder Revue tour, in 1975 and 1976, he sang duets with Baez of traditional tunes like "Wild Mountain Thyme" and "The Water Is Wide," and, on his own, he recorded two albums of them, "Good as I Been to You" (1992) and "World Gone Wrong" (1993). He never again had a period when the masterpieces came so quickly, so automatically, as they did in the early and mid-sixties, but what is remarkable is how often in the later years lightning has struck. There are precious few American songs as great as (to name some) "Idiot Wind" (1975), "Isis" (1976), "When He Returns" (1979), "Every Grain of Sand" (1981), "Blind Willie McTell" (1983), and "Cold Irons Bound" and "Not Dark Yet," from the 1997 album "Time Out of Mind." Dylan plays at least a hundred concerts a year—college gymnasiums, urban concert halls, casinos, anywhere with an audience. Nearly every night, he opens with a standard pulled from the past, and the segue from, say, "Duncan and Brady," which was made famous by Leadbelly, to one of his own songs is seamless. For good reason: as his voice grows reedier, ever more weathered by experience and by grit, he is beginning to sound as one with Dock Boggs, the Alabama Sacred Harp Singers, Mississippi John Hurt, and the rest of Harry Smith's classic chorus. He now walks onto the stage less like that inconsequential thing, a rock star, and more like Guthrie or John Lee Hooker. He is the rare writer and singer who reveals the whole of a time and the whole of himself. ♦

BOOKS

FAMILY FEELINGS

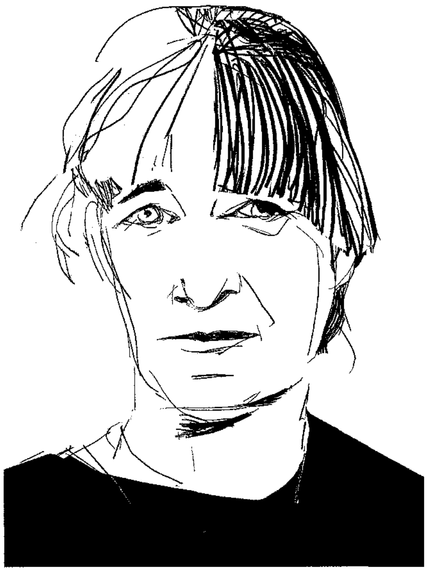
A novel that charts the sideways drift of our affections.

BY TOM SHONE

Anne Tyler's new novel, the enchantingly titled "Back When We Were Grownups" (Knopf; $25), begins, "Once upon a time, there was a woman who discovered she had turned into the wrong person." It is a common lament, and one that the novel seems particularly well attuned to: if the entire human race woke up tomorrow and decided that we all had exactly the lives we wanted and deserved, most novelists would be out of a job by lunchtime. But Rebecca Davitch, Tyler's new heroine, has, at fifty-three, more cause for existential discombobulation than most. For a start, there's her work—as a party organizer who throws opens her big Baltimore house for the intimate celebrations of complete strangers. Then, there's her family, which has all the characteristics of a normal family—being boisterous, unruly, and utterly dependent on Rebecca for the running of their affairs—without the advantage of actually being hers.

Technically speaking, they belong to her husband, Joe, but Joe died several years back, leaving Rebecca sitting in the middle of the vast brood of Davitches: three daughters from Joe's previous marriage, their husbands and children, plus a raft of dependents, all called something like Zeb and Poppy, or Patch and NoNo—even their names suggest fragments of some larger pattern, now lost. Rebecca has one daughter of her own in all this, Minerva, but, because she was born with Asian-looking eyes, she was nicknamed Min Foo. "So much for Minerva," Rebecca thinks, and in that stoical shrug you catch the patented Tyler tone—with its seemingly infinite reserves of patient good humor—and inch close to Rebecca's predicament: what chance is there that people's lives will work out as planned when their Christian names won't obey orders?

Tyler throws the whole lot of them at us at once, at a family picnic, with Rebecca fruitlessly attempting to corral everyone into a softball game, while the reader fruitlessly attempts to organize them into something resembling digestible dramatis personae. Your panic suits Tyler's purpose fine, of course, for if you are struggling to stay afloat, so, too, is Rebecca these days, and that night she starts to dream an alternative life for herself: a life in which she married, rather than jilted, her college sweetheart, Will—he of the yellow curls and the serious, abstracted air. By now, she thinks, the two of them would be spending "cerebral and nonsocial" evenings reading on the couch or going over the grades of their quiet but gifted son. Needless to say, she looks Will up and they go on a date.



Anne Tyler

RICCARDO VECCHIO

The result is a superb set-piece scene—as the dignity of middle age is beset by wriggling date anxieties that haven't seen the light of day in decades—although the comedy quickly curdles into a series of recriminations and hasty exits, as we thought it might. But then that's the thing about Anne Tyler novels: your certainty about how things are going to turn out in no way interferes with your desire to see them do so. Tyler's plots are the mere stuff of family albums, really—a procession of marriages, births, deaths. And yet her feel for character is so keen that even hardened metafictionalists—readers who subsist on a diet of Robbe-Grillet and who would happily fry the whole notion of "character" for breakfast—are reduced to the role of helpless gossips, swapping avid hunches about the possible fates of the characters. You're involved before you even notice you were paying attention.

This is more than a matter of technique; it is also Tyler's central theme. She has published fifteen novels now, each charting the stealthy sideways drift of our affections—the mission creep of the human heart. For a novelist so obsessed with families, she sets little store by actual blood ties. In her 1991 novel "Saint Maybe," Tyler imagined an experiment conducted by aliens, who cut a house in half and spliced it onto the half of another:

> This woman woke up with a man and some children she'd never laid eyes on before. Naturally she was terribly puzzled and upset, and the others were too, but as it happened the children had some kind of illness . . . and so of course she did everything she could to make them comfortable. The creatures' conclusion, therefore, was that earthlings didn't discriminate. Their family feelings, so called, were a matter of blind circumstance.

That this slightly disconcerting news might be refitted as consolation is perhaps Tyler's greatest insight, and in "Back When We Were Grownups" it is given soft, ruminative form. It is certainly her least hurriable book; Rebecca is Tyler's oldest heroine to date—not quite old enough to hear the title "grandmother" without a wince but old enough to be edging beyond the more urgently youthful imperatives of narrative, its tightly sprung surprises and busy matchmaking instincts. Still, Tyler cannot quite tamp those instincts down; the business with Will may not work out as planned, but there is a character in this book who would be ideal for Rebecca. An earlier book, with younger protagonists, would have ushered them safely into one another's arms, but Tyler respectfully leaves it as a hint, hanging in the air when you put the book down. It's a delightful gift to a heroine who attempted a new beginning for her life: an entirely open ending. ♦

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BRIEFLY NOTED

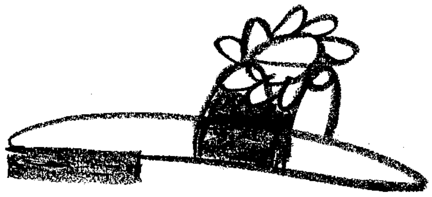
The Faithful Narrative of a Pastor's Disappearance, *by Benjamin Anastas (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $24).* This satirical addition to the literature of suburban disappointment takes place in the Massachusetts town of W——, where car radios are "set permanently to NPR" and "Paxil and Zoloft had long since entered the local vocabulary, and stood, now, for happiness and hope." Bethany Caruso, unsatisfied wife, and mother of two, has stopped taking her antidepressant for the time being, relying instead on white wine in a box and the occasional joint to help her through a difficult stretch. She has been conducting an affair with the inspirational and mysterious pastor of the Pilgrims' Congregational Church, and he has gone missing. The author is compassionate toward his Prynne-like heroine, but his suburbia is, in its way, as dour as the vestigial Puritanism that burdens his characters—a world in which crab-apple blossoms explode "with the wild promise of inedible fruit."

The Wooden Sea, *by Jonathan Carroll (Tor; $23.95).* Frannie McCabe, a mellowing middle-aged former bad boy who is now the police chief of a Hudson Valley town, opens the trunk of his car to discover the body of the pet pit bull he has just buried. But then things get weird, and not just Carl Hiaasen weird; McCabe finds himself teamed up with his seventeen-year-old self in a time-travel fantasy-thriller, set almost entirely in his home town but involving aliens, cold fusion, and a sinister twenty-first-century Dutch entrepreneur. The result is a quirky piece of intelligent pop that is also surprisingly moving.

Death in Holy Orders, *by P. D. James (Knopf; $25).* This engrossing, almost consoling whodunit is a classic closed-box mystery: almost everything happens behind the closed doors of St. Anselm's, a small Anglican theological college set on a windy cliff abutting the sea. Commander Adam Dalgliesh, as always both wistful and stern, returns to St. Anselm's, where he spent a few blissful boyhood summers, to investigate the death of a student, but the case quickly expands as bodies begin to fall like so many dominoes. It's a pleasure to read James at the top of her form, as she often is here, especially when she's delineating the differences between supposedly like-minded souls, but this time around the dénouement lacks the force majeure that readers have come to expect.

Rides of the Midway, *by Lee Durkee (Norton; $25.95).* Barrelling into the catcher of an opposing Little League team at home plate, ten-year-old Noel Weatherspoon puts the other boy into a coma—an accident that sentences him to a tormented nineteen-seventies Mississippi adolescence. In this tender and hallucinatory first novel, episodes with the local police, high-school girls, and an abusive stepfather pass like dreams as Noel alternates between the comforting numbness of drugs and the terrifying clarity of his visions.

Two Jews on a Train, *by Adam Biro, translated from the French by Catherine Tihanyi (Chicago; $17).* The travels of the Jews in these short stories—from Transylvania to the American desert, from Vienna to New York, from Baghdad to Paris—never seem to get them quite where they're headed. The book is fundamentally a compilation of renovated jokes and shtetl tales, and Biro moves easily between adaptations of Jewish standards, reminiscent of Sholem Aleichem's "Railroad Stories," and more modern parables. But, in applying an Old World sensibility to the present, the author underscores the nature of the divide between them, and the increasingly despairing punch line of each joke seems to become: Why did You abandon us?



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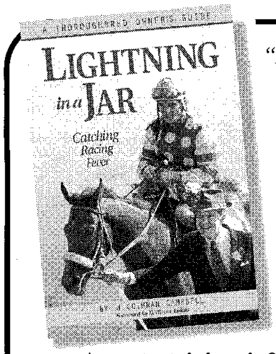
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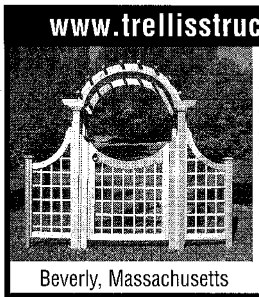
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KING OF THE HILL

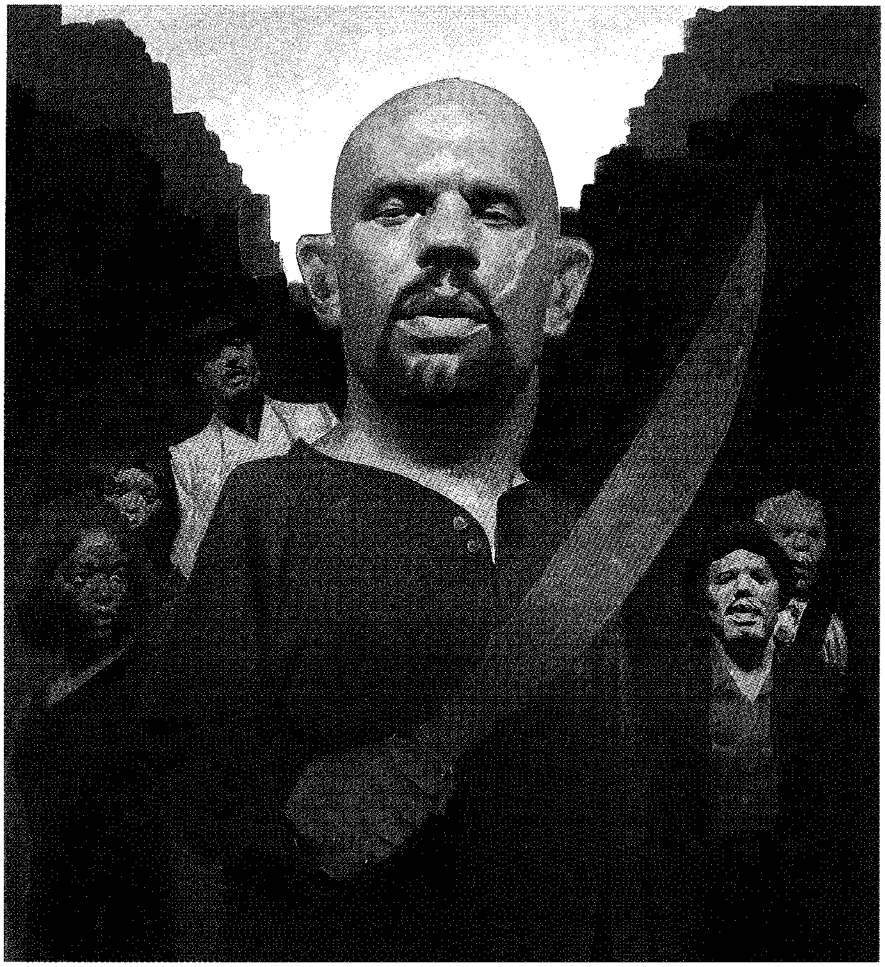
Rage and redemption in August Wilson's America.

BY NANCY FRANKLIN

The sense of rhythm and blues that underlies and underscores August Wilson's plays is very much in evidence in his new work, "King Hedley II," at the Virginia, though the music of this play's sphere is a long way from the Delta and Chicago. The play is set in 1985, well within living memory, and, as you walk down the aisle to your seat, you hear the rhythm track from Michael Jackson's "Billie Jean." As the evening goes by, the music that plays between scenes mutates from funk to gangsta rap, and each musical variant increasingly, thuddingly insists on its own right to exist, seeming to drown out the very idea of other musical possibilities—just as the depressed setting of the play, a dirt yard behind some run-down brick houses in the Hill District of Pittsburgh, seems to drown out the possibility that its inhabitants will ever have a better way of life than the one that holds them here. These snippets of noisy self-declaration could be the calling card of the play's eponymous protagonist; having recently served seven years in prison for killing a man who had slashed his face with a razor, the thirty-six-year-old King (Brian Stokes Mitchell, late of "Kiss Me, Kate"), named after a father he never met—who also once murdered a man—is angrily insistent on his right to assert himself, regardless of the cost. (Easy enough to do, I suppose, when you carry a Glock, as King does.) "I set me out a little circle and anything come inside my circle I say what happen and don't happen," he says. "I can decide whether you live or die. I'm in charge of that." King doesn't seem to have learned much in prison, other than how to hone his sense of regret at being caught: "I done got smarter. The next one's gonna be self-defense. The next one ain't gonna cost me nothing."

Bynum, the conjure man in Wilson's "Joe Turner's Come and Gone" (1988), might have described King as a man who has forgotten his song. He's out of synch with his own life. As his mother, Ruby (Leslie Uggams), says to King's unhappily pregnant wife, Tonya (Viola Davis), "Life's got its own rhythm. It don't always go along with your rhythm. . . . You ever match them up and you won't have to worry about nothing." But King is a man at war with himself: he's capable of tending the seeds he has planted in the dirt, of trying to make something grow, minutes after robbing a jewelry store with his friend Mister (Monté Russell). Much is made of King's seeds; they are planted front and center on the stage, and, after Elmore (the suave Charles Brown), an old lover of Ruby's, accidentally steps on the shoots that have come up, King surrounds them with a ring of barbed wire. Because of the Biblical warnings and injunctions proffered with regularity by an otherworldly character called Stool Pigeon (the excellent Stephen McKinley Henderson), it is impossible not to think that the wire is meant to convey a kind of crown of thorns, and equally impossible to conclude that King has in any way earned the title of martyr. Mitchell, a tall man with a booming voice, does not endow King with any particular magnetism beyond that of someone who is possibly dangerous: we keep our eyes on him to make sure nobody gets hurt. It's made clear that there are no jobs to be had by the men of the Hill—that's why King and Mister are involved in a scam selling stolen refrigerators—but there's no indication that if circumstances were different King wouldn't have been, say, on the junk-bond desk at Drexel Burnham Lambert.

Misplaced pride and not getting with the program until it's almost too late are, of course, what make a tragic hero, but King's redemption, when it comes, lacks psychological credibility. His turnaround hinges on his discovering a piece of information that, if he had any depth or curiosity, he would have discovered years earlier. (For one thing, his wife, who knew it, could have clued him in.) It's a little



Brian Stokes Mitchell as "King Hedley II" 's tragic hero.

DANIEL ADEL

too easy and a little too neat—his revelation comes when, on a visit to his first wife's grave, King happens to pass the grave of the man he killed. He suddenly waxes homiletic, comparing his thriving little plants with the life he took: "Pernell stepped on me and I pulled his life out by the root." Of his scar, he adds, "I used to think Pernell did that to me. But I did it to myself." And, on the basis of this new-found understanding, he tries to persuade Tonya to have the baby she doesn't want. (She doesn't want it because the baby she had at seventeen, and raised more or less alone, now has a baby of her own and doesn't even know who the father is; Tonya has seen enough.)

By now, some in the audience may feel that they, too, have seen enough; "Hedley" 's heavy cargo of symbolism and coincidence makes it feel like a soap opera. (A three-hour soap opera.) Despite the good performances, under the direction of Marion McClinton, the characters seem to be drawn together solely so that Wilson can orchestrate a tragedy, which, when it arrives, seems not inevitable but predictable. (There are, among the six characters, four guns: the odds are high that lead will fly. And have I mentioned the bloodstained machete?) The play doesn't even seem eighties-specific, except in the newspaper headlines that Stool Pigeon reads aloud, and in a voice-over in which President Reagan is heard announcing that it's morning in America again. It's possible that this is deliberate on Wilson's part, that he is pointing out that a lack of opportunity makes one a displaced person in one's own time. But, for the most part, Wilson's poetic aspirations are out of rhythm with what is actually on the stage at the Virginia, as the characters overexplain themselves and their motivations. One of the play's most eloquent touches, it turns out, is entirely silent. Next to King's house, a trumpet lies discarded in the dirt; no one picks it up and plays it, or even remarks on it. All by itself, it makes the statement that "Hedley" itself cannot quite make, which is that the eighties did not constitute a fanfare for the common man—they were a time when the country forgot its song. ♦

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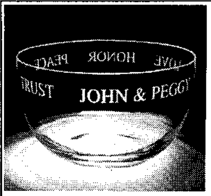

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THE CURRENT CINEMA

EXCESS STORIES

"Startup.com" and "Town & Country."

BY DAVID DENBY

However brief, the Internet fire-up and fizzle of the past few years now seems a completed historical epoch—a period as saturated with romantic hope and folly as the Gold Rush or the Jazz Age. When it was under way, the boom felt amazing, even illusory; and, now that it's over, some of us are trying to hold on to specific moments before they harden into rancid jokes or the glazed finish of official history. The new documentary "startup.com" is unlikely to be the most informative record of the period, but it's fresh and vividly painful. One of the filmmakers, Jehane Noujaim, shared an apartment with a young Goldman, Sachs employee named Kaleil Isaza Tuzman. When Tuzman left Goldman, in the spring of 1999, and joined a startup called govWorks.com, Noujaim began following him around with a video camera. She was joined by the veteran cinéma-vérité filmmaker Chris Hegedus. For a year and a half, the two women clung to their subjects—Tuzman and his high-school buddy and business partner, Tom Herman—like moss to a tree. They arrived in early morning, nosed into meetings and arguments, drove around with the two men as they aired their desires and their sufferings. Some of us may wonder, as we always do when we watch this sort of documentary, how much the camera's presence altered the subjects' behavior. Now and then, you can see the men choosing their words with excessive care. Young and self-conscious, they're obviously trying to live up to the moment. But, in the end, I suspect that the camera merely reinforced the real-life situation of two beginners who got in way over their heads and then flailed around trying to find the right way to act. As their enterprise veers toward disaster, you can sense that neither of them has the heart to fake anything.

Tuzman's company was devoted to reducing the distance between ordinary citizens and local government. The Web site allowed users to pay a parking ticket or access government sites. It certainly sounds dull enough to be a solid idea for a Web site. But how do you make money out of it? Burly and handsome, with very bright eyes and an easy, ready way about him, Tuzman, who is apparently a Latino Jew, talks in one meeting with a venture capitalist of a "vertical market of five hundred and eighty-six billion dollars." Preposterous figures like that one are repeated several times, and no one, back there in 1999, seems to laugh at them. Tom Herman, the technical guy in charge of designing the Web site, is even more of a dreamer. His parents, New England folkies, run a summer camp and speak of the primacy of treating people well, and Tom, who has a black daughter, translates that legacy into a rather high-minded diffidence regarding the enterprise itself, particularly when things go wrong. He's less resilient than Tuzman, but they're both too emotional—they're always falling into each other's arms. Their friendship is touching but possibly dangerous to the business.

After some initial rebuffs, Tuzman and a group of associates raise some sixty million dollars, and govWorks fills four floors of Manhattan office space with computers and eventually hires more than two hundred ethnically mixed workers. But from the beginning the enterprise is shadowed with more portents of doom than the prelude to "Götterdämmerung." As the two men force out one partner, they worry about sabotage at his hands. The trouble with cinéma-

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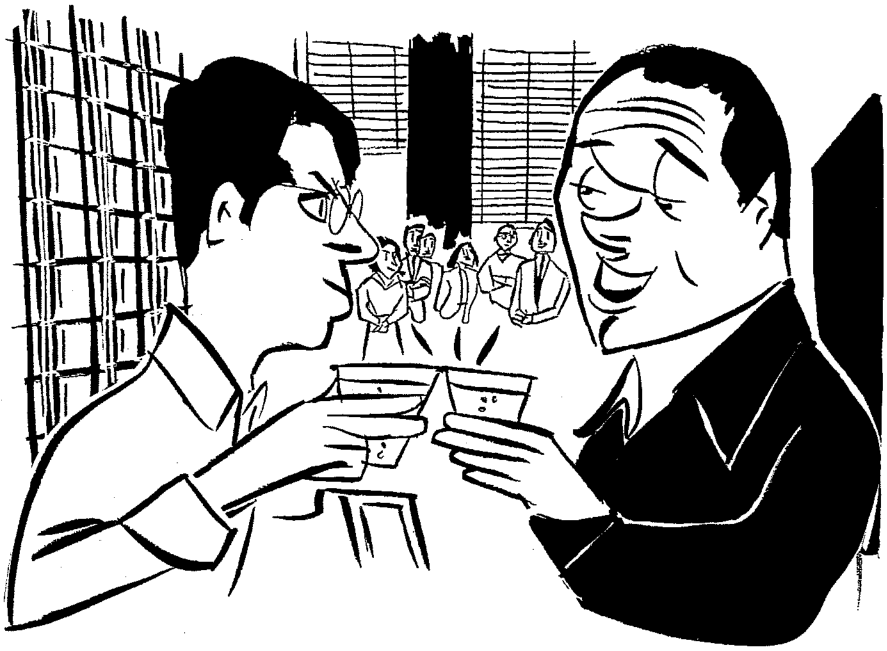
vérité methods is that the viewer has no way of evaluating such a moment. When the C.E.O. of a rival Internet company shows up, grinning and making nice, and then some months later the office gets ransacked in the middle of the night and key papers are stolen, are the filmmakers suggesting that the rival cased the joint and engineered the burglary? Catastrophe follows catastrophe, and we have to guess what went wrong. When the site goes live on the Internet, it isn't good enough, and the company, led by Tuzman, forces Tom Herman out and has him removed from the building. The implication is that Tuzman kept himself from admitting that his friend's design was inadequate until it was far, far too late, but we can't be sure. As they split, the two men, on the verge of tears, clothe their feelings of hurt and betrayal in the business jargon of "equity" and "termination"—the moment is both comical and pathetic.

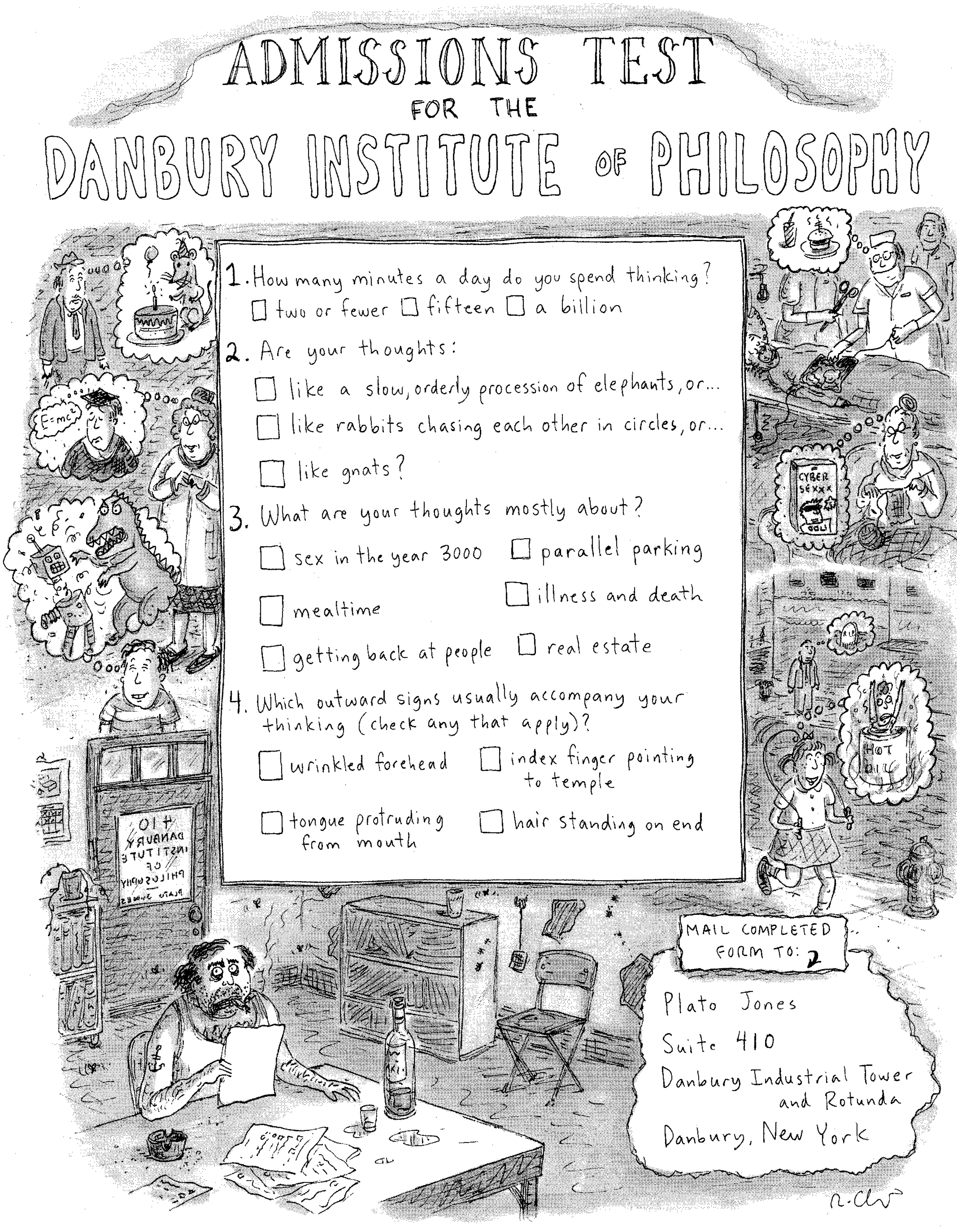

Tom Herman and Kaleil Isaza Tuzman: friends in an enterprise that goes wrong.

TOM BACHTELL

"Startup.com" captures that fragile moment when the counterculture liberalism of the sixties mated with the Reaganite cowboy capitalism of the eighties. It was an awkward coupling, and now that its offspring have failed, hard-nosed business types may find it absurd that such arrogant neophytes were ever allowed to set up companies. The filmmakers' point of view, by contrast, is that the two men are better off as failures—there is a strained, rather sheepish final scene in which the renewal of their friendship after the company's collapse is presented as a moral victory. Well, I don't know; that ending, I think, falls into sentimentality. These two guys blew sixty million dollars because they didn't really know what they were doing. Their failure, and the failure of the dot-com boys and girls in general, makes it unlikely that the idealism and friendship which the movie celebrates will ever play so large a role in business again.

Much tinkered with and long shelved, the ninety-million-dollar adultery comedy "Town & Country" emerges into the light at last, unsteady on its feet and wearing a green foundation of mold. One could, without danger of error, denounce the picture as the ultimate waste product of a corrupt and exhausted system. But, in truth, the movie is too lame to cause either outrage or grief—an indifferent shrug is more likely to be the audience response. Warren Beatty, now in his sixties, tries to keep the show alive. He exposes his chest, falls off a roof, cavorts in a disco wearing a polar-bear costume; he even makes a long speech castigating himself as a woman-chasing sleaze. The speech is embarrassing: who's accusing Beatty of sin? But one admires the man's gallantry in a lost cause. Set on the Upper East Side of Manhattan and at various vacation homes, "Town & Country" observes the old screwball-comedy convention of misbehavior among the rich, but it misses the point of the convention—in the thirties, the wealthy were such a juicy subject because they were easily exploited as heedless eccentrics (no one's feelings were likely to be hurt by the charge). But the characters in "Town & Country" are just blandly affluent and self-protecting. Beatty plays some sort of fabulously wealthy architect who commits adultery after twenty-five years of marriage to a fabulously successful fabric designer (Diane Keaton). When things go awry, we wait for a rush of wit and craziness, but the two famous actors—all the actors—are stuck with dully functional lines. Keaton and her best friend, Goldie Hawn, compare notes on a bench in Central Park, and Keaton says, "Could you think about compassion? Or even forgiveness?" To which Hawn, whose husband (Garry Shandling) has also been cheating, replies, "What about betrayal? What about humiliation?" Since the actors have nothing in particular to play, many scenes are constructed around such tiresome tricks as having someone get interrupted just as he's about to confess something. (Shandling goes through scene after scene trying to tell people that he's gay.) The movie has been handsomely mounted and photographed, but the narrative is so badly managed (by the writers, Michael Laughlin and Buck Henry, and the director, Peter Chelsom) that minor characters get elaborately introduced only to disappear without a trace, and fresh characters spring out of nowhere—Charlton Heston, waving a shotgun and snarling; the distinguished theatre actress Marian Seldes motoring around in a wheelchair while hissing profanities. "Town & Country" never seems more passé than at those desperate moments when it tries to leap over two generations and out-curse the Farrelly brothers. A misfire like this one is particularly a shame because the audience seems very much in the mood for romantic comedy. The malicious will point out that you could make two, maybe three, little romantic comedies with just the interest on the loans that financed "Town & Country"—not good movies, perhaps, but at least movies that were in touch with contemporary feeling. Missing both the past and the present, "Town & Country" doesn't seem to be in touch with much of anything. ♦

THE BACK PAGE BY ROZ CHAST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☐ like a slow, orderly procession of elephants, or...
☐ like rabbits chasing each other in circles, or...
☐ like gnats?
3. What are your thoughts mostly about?
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☐ parallel parking
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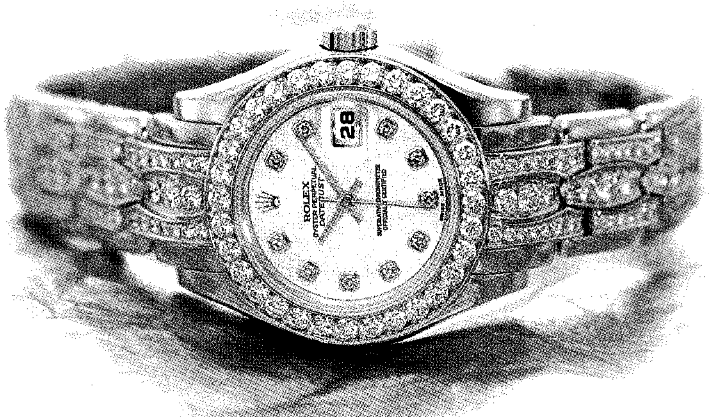

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